

Sermons Preached by the Rev. Raymond Shaheen, D. D.

<u>Year: 1971</u>	<u>SERMON TITLE</u>	<u>TEXT</u>
January 3	"Christ's Deepest Conviction"	Luke 11:21
January 10	Thirty Years Plus One	
January 24	"She Wears A Cross"	
January 31	"False Face"	Genesis 1:26
February 7	"On Being Good - For Nothing"	
February 14	"God's Escape Route"	I Corinthians 10:13
February 21	"An Adequate Philosophy Of Life"	I Peters 4:10
February 28	"A Man Named Peter"	Mark 14:29, 31
March 7	"A Man Named Judas"	John 18:2
March 14	"A Man Names Annas"	John 18:13
March 21	"A Man Named Herod"	
March 28	"A Man Named Pilate"	John 19:4, 16
April 4	"Beyond Tears"	Luke 19:41
April 11	"A Sermon For Easter"	John 20:1
April 18	"A Man Named Thomas"	John 20:24-25
April 18	"It Takes Loves' (to "Natural High" Young People)	
April 25	"Into The World 's Ugly Face"	Ephesians 6:11
May 2	"When Good Men Suffer"	I Peter 2:20
May 9	"A Sermon For Parents"	Proverbs 22:6
May 23	"To clamber Up On God's Seat"	Isaiah 6:1

1971- continued

SERMON TITLE

TEXT

May 30	"Great Day"	Acts 2:1
May 30	"Your Moment Of Truth"	
June 13	"God Of The Forward Look"	Psalms 90
June 20	"Through Life's Changing Pattern"	II Peter 3:11-13
June 27	"Who Make Mistakes"	Luke 15:1
July 4	"A Nation Under God"	Psalms 67:1-2
August 8	<i>incomplete from notes</i>	John 4:41-42
August 15	"Be Alert -- To Glory"	Luke 9:32
August 22	"On Doing Good"	Acts 5:15
August 29	"What A Difference"	II Corinthians 5:17
September 5	"The Peril Of Our Day"	Luke 5:27-28
September 12	"Two At Once"	Hebrews 11:27
September 26	"On Growing Older"	Job 29:4
October 3	Meditation	
October 10	"The True Peacemaker"	Matthew 5:9
October 17	"The Common Mercies"	Psalms 51:15
October 24	"On Being Good For Something"	Hebrews 12:2
October 31	"The Man With The Book"	
November 7	"A Christian Facing Death"	John 14:27
November 21	"Coming - Ready Or Not"	Matthew 25:6
November 28	"The Day Is At Hand - Get With It"	

1971- continued

SERMON TITLE

TEXT

December 12

"The Right Question"

December 19

"When He Comes Again - Ready?"

December 24

"Ridiculous"

December 31

Jeremiah 4:23-24

1970

Nov.

Dec.	6	Advent II	<u>"HE COMES: REJECT HIM"</u>
	13	Advent III	<u>"HE COMES: IGNORE HIM"</u> (Luke 2:7)
	20	Advent IV	<u>"HE COMES: RECOGNIZE HIM"</u>
	24	Christmas Eve	<u>"SURPRISE!"</u>
	27	St. John, Apostle Evangelist	<u>"A DIFFERENT WAY"</u>

1971

Jan.	3	Christmas II	<u>"CHRIST'S DEEPEST CONVICTION"</u> (Luke 11:21)
	10	Anniversary Sunday	<u>THIRTY YEARS PLUS ONE</u>
	24	Epiphany III	<u>"SHE WEARS A CROSS"</u>
	31	EPIPHANY IV	<u>"FALSE FACE"</u> (Genesis 1:26)
Feb.	7	Septuagesima	<u>"ON BEING GOOD - FOR NOTHING"</u>
	14	Sexagesima	<u>"GOD'S ESCAPE ROUTE"</u> (I Cor. 10:13)
	21	Quinquagesima	<u>"AN ADEQUATE PHILOSOPHY OF LIFE"</u> (I Peter 4:10)
	28	Lent I	<u>"A MAN NAMED PETER"</u> (Mark 14:29, 31)
Mar.	7	Lent II	<u>"A MAN NAMED JUDAS"</u> (John 18:2)
	14	Lent III	<u>"A MAN NAMED ANNAS"</u> (John 18:13)
	21	Lent IV	<u>"A MAN NAMED HEROD"</u>
	28	Passion Sunday	<u>"A MAN NAMED PILATE"</u> (John 19: 4 and 16)

SERMONS

PREACHED BY THE Rev. Raymond Shaheen, D.D.
Pastor, Saint Luke Lutheran Church
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1971

April	4	<u>Palm Sunday</u>	"BEYOND TEARS" (Luke 19:41)
	11	<u>Easter Day</u>	A SERMON FOR EASTER" (John 20:1)
	18	<u>Easter I</u> (11:15 hour)	"A MAN NAMED THOMAS" (John 20:24-25)
	?	(9:45 hour)	"IT TAKES LOVE" (to "Natural High" cast)
	25	<u>Easter II</u>	"INTO THE WORLD'S UGLY FACE" (Ephesians 6:11)
May	2	<u>Easter III</u>	"WHEN GOOD MEN SUFFER" (I Peter 2:20)
	9	<u>Easter IV</u> Festival of the Christian Home)	"A SERMON FOR PARENTS" (Proverbs 22:6)
	23	<u>Sunday After Ascension</u>	"TO CLAMBER UP ON GOD'S SEAT" (Isaiah 6:1)
	30	<u>Pentecost</u>	"GREAT DAY!" (Acts 2:1)
			"YOUR MOMENT OF TRUTH" (Confirmation sermon)
June	13	<u>Trinity I</u>	"GOD OF THE FORWARD LOOK" (Psalm 90)
	20	<u>Trinity II</u>	"THROUGH LIFE'S CHANGING PATTERN" (2 Peter 3:11-13)
	27	<u>Trinity III</u>	"WHO MAKE MISTAKES" (Luke 15:1)
July	4	<u>Trinity IV</u>	"A NATION UNDER GOD" (Psalm 67:1-2)

1971

August	8	Trinity IX	(John 4:41-42) - incomplete, from notes
	15	Trinity X	<u>"BE ALERT -- TO GLORY"</u> (Luke 9:32)
	22	Trinity XI	<u>"ON DOING GOOD"</u> (Acts 5:15)
	29	Trinity XII	<u>"WHAT A DIFFERENCE"</u> (II Corinthians 5:17)
Sept.	5	Trinity XIII	<u>"THE PERIL OF OUR DAY"</u> (Luke 5:27-28)
	12	Trinity IV	<u>"TWO AT ONCE"</u> (Hebrews 11:27)
	19	Trinity XV	<u>"GOD'S STANDARD OF JUDGMENT"</u> (Matthew 25:44-45)
	26	Trinity XVI	<u>"ON GROWING OLDER"</u> (Job 29:4)
Oct.	3	World-Wide Communion	Meditation - Preparatory to Festival Service of Holy Communion at 5:00
	10	Trinity XVIII	<u>"THE TRUE PEACEMAKER"</u> (Matthew 5:9)
	17	Festival of Harvest	<u>"THE COMMON MERCIES"</u> (Psalm 51:15)
	24	Trinity XX	<u>"ON BEING GOOD FOR SOMETHING"</u> (Hebrews 12:2)
	31	Reformation Day	<u>"THE MAN WITH THE BOOK"</u>
Nov.	7	All Saints' Sunday	<u>"A CHRISTIAN FACING DEATH"</u> (John 14:27)
	21	Trinity Last	<u>"COMING - READY OR NOT"</u> (Matthew 25:6)
	28	Advent I	<u>"THE DAY IS AT HAND - GET WITH IT!"</u>

"CHRIST'S DEEPEST CONVICTION"
(Luke 11:21)

Through Jesus Christ, Thy
Son, our Lord. Amen.

There is a text for the sermon, of course, but if you don't mind, let me read it for you a little bit later. Now let me tell you the setting for the text, just what the occasion was that prompted our Blessed Lord to speak the words that command our attention today.

Well, it was one of those occasions when a bunch of needlers gave the preacher a hard time. It really wasn't because of anything that He had said; it was because of something that He had done. He had successfully brought off a miracle, right in front of their very eyes, and then much to your surprise, I must tell you, they weren't about to accept it. So at once they did what little-minded people do; they decided to discredit Him.

It wasn't easy, since there wasn't anything in His record that they could latch onto. So then they had to do the next thing: they had to trump up something, like saying He was the tool of the Devil. Now that's really quite a trick to pull. Maybe we could say it's the old game of the Big Lie. You see, He had worked this miracle on this man, not just because of a display of power, but because of compassion. Somehow He wanted the goodness of God to break through, and this man became the recipient for this beneficent act. These little-minded people just couldn't see it that way. So instead of calling Him good, they said this demon that's gone out of this man has gone out because this miracle-worker is in league with the Prince of Devils. So instead of thanking Jesus Christ and calling Him good and praising Him, they began to damn Him.

Now as over against that, Jesus Christ, rising to His fullest stature, looked them straight in the eye and spoke the words that constitute the text for this meditation:

"When a strong man fully armed guards his own palace, his goods are in peace; but when one stronger than he assails him and overcomes him, he takes away the armor in which he trusted and he divides his spoil . . ."

Now we'd better take a look at that text again right now.

" . . . When a strong man fully armed guards his
own palace . . . "

...to whom is Jesus Christ referring?

Would you believe it that Jesus Christ is here referring to the Devil! And then Jesus goes on to say that there will come a time when someone stronger than this man who is so firmly entrenched will loom on the horizon and unseat him -- overcome him ---- now who is this man to whom Jesus Christ refers as the 'one who is stronger than the strong man so firmly entrenched'? The reference that Jesus Christ here is making is to God Himself.

Now it seems to me that when Jesus Christ spoke these words and replied to His needlers in this manner, He was giving expression to some of His deepest convictions. Every now and then life will give us an opportunity to express what we honestly believe, and here you have the Carpenter's-Son-turned-preacher making known to these people that while evil may have its day, good eventually overcomes evil. Now that's something to live by!

I frankly confess to you, as I have on other occasions, that it's not been an easy thing for me the last few years to keep reminding myself that behind the dim shadow that's cast over the world there is the strong pre-

vailing hand of God that will eventually show itself. Oh, don't misunderstand me, I have never lost my faith in God, and I have never lost my belief in the primacy of God, but I have had my moments when I have been overwhelmed with the hand of evil. When I read what I have been reading lately, and when I see what's thrown on the television screen, of man's hostility to man and man's inhumanity to man, and how here and there in almost every quarter of the globe the devil raises his ugly head, I have had to force myself to my knees to remind myself that the God who is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ has not abdicated, and that eventually goodness prevails.

But there are any number of you who have succumbed to the same type of thing to which I have referred -- evil is firmly entrenched in this world and it's only a fool who doesn't see it. The Devil is having his way, in all too many places with all too many people, all too many times, and the shadow of the Devil is cast upon all of us.

Now it's one thing to say this. But there is something more that needs to be said: that because this is true, if you and I haven't been on our guard, we may reach the point where we'll say to ourselves: Why try to be good? - - and so wittingly or unwittingly we accommodate ourselves to the evil that is in the world -- Why not compromise?....since we do not live in an ideal world, let's subscribe to unideal forces and factors that will determine our conduct. You see, this is the thing that we have to be guarding ourselves against constantly. It's one thing to recognize the fact that there is evil in the world, but then it's another thing to allow yourself to subscribe to it and to order your life as though evil is going to remain dominant forever.

When our Blessed Lord spoke to these needlers, He expressed His basic conviction that eventually, while evil may have its moment, eventually good prevails, for there is always a stronger one that looms on the horizon, and that stronger one is God. Evil, in the mind of Jesus Christ, is strong, but it never gets beyond second place! When Jesus Christ spoke these words there was no question in His mind but what God is God and the Devil is the Devil, goodness is goodness and evil is evil - - - and what for Him was eternally right was eternally right!.....and whatever was wrong was eternally wrong.

He, too, lived in a wicked world. He, too, lived out the days of His years with the shadow of evil cast upon Him forever, and He never escaped it. The evil of His day was so real that you know how He ended up His earthly pilgrimage -- the most wicked of all things that the mind of man could ever conceive -- the bold attempt to have done with goodness, to give love the bum's rush out of the world -- to crucify One sent to be the King of Men, the Saviour of the world. Yet He ordered the days of His years on the basic conviction that God is God, Devil is Devil, goodness is goodness, evil is evil.....what is right is eternally right, what is wrong is eternally wrong.

That's a far cry from our day. I'm firmly convinced that part of our trouble lies in the fact that we've lost our moral bearings. For any number of people they're no longer certain as to what is right, and to what is wrong. We live in a day when we have people who are very easily saying that what they were once taught was wrong they now call right, and they permit themselves all kinds of sorties into the realm of evil, and they can

rationalize, and they can justify it. We've lost our sense of moral bearings.

If I were not a member of a religious community, I think I'd be inclined, if I were a serious-minded person, to give it more than passing attention because I think through the reading of history I would be forced to admit that man was meant to live according to some code of ethics, some pattern of moral behavior. And if I were not drawn to Christianity for any other reason, I think I'd be attracted to it because of the pattern for life which it lays down in front of it and the example that it gives in Jesus Christ, whom some of us have come now to reverently refer to as Lord and Saviour. But ours is a day and ours is an age, you see, when we've lost our sense of moral direction.

A preacher one time was sharing with his fellow pastors some of his experiences with his parishioners, and he told about a man to whom he went to minister as he was nearing his earthly pilgrimage. Because he was a good pastor, and perceptive, he was aware that this man had something that was bugging him that he just couldn't quite free from his mind. Patiently and deliberately the pastor succeeded in getting the chap to get it off his chest — (I warn you not to make light of it) -- memory for some people can be long, and this man, whatever his years, happened to remember when he was a teenager, recklessly one day, or was it one night, he took the sign-post at a street intersection and completely reversed it, as some folks are wont to do....

...some weeks, months, maybe years later, he read that somebody else had done a similar thing, and according to the newspaper account, when an ambulance was answering an emergency call, it came to that intersection where the street signs had been completely reversed and because the ambulance

driver went in the opposite direction, the man's life that might have been saved, died.....

This becomes very real to me now when I go to Holy Cross Hospital and I go looking for a parking place....the heart-mobile that's stationed there, poised for action -- it's one of the few, you know, here on the East Coast, a complete unit, almost a duplication of the Coronary Care Unit in the hospital itself.....and I think of how if it were somebody in my family, or your family, when the call had gone out, and when the heart-mobile comes to an intersection and somebody had reversed the sign and it goes in the wrong direction -- a unit, mark you, that's geared to the high value that has to be placed on a split second in a person's life!

Well I share this with you because I believe that there's something parabolic, I think there are people recklessly who have turned the direction signals around, in the realm of ethics and patterns of moral behavior. I think there are some people who are sending us in the wrong direction, and God Himself knows how much irreparable damage is being done -- until, perchance, people find out that they have been given a bum steer, all because we're confused as to what is right and what is wrong. With Jesus Christ there was never any question in His mind about it.

Now having said all of this, as I stand before you at the sacred desk facing a brand new year, I would share with you a measure of hope and courage because there are those who deal with what is right and what is wrong and who are spending their time and their energy trying to tell people that there are certain directions that can still be trusted, certain roads that you can take with a measure of security, because they have been time-tested and time-honored.

Now as over against all of that, I am happy to tell you that in this business between what is right and what is wrong, in this business between what is good and what is evil -- even if evil should have its day, good eventually conquers -- I am happy to tell you that. I give you the word on the authority of Jesus Christ Himself, by what He said and by the way He lived. I give it to you on the authority of the prophets....I give it to you on the authority of the sacred truth of the sacred writings. Evil may be entrenched, but eventually good prevails.

They tell me there is a tiny island off the north coast of Australia, the name of the island I've quite forgotten -- but a number of years ago there was a volcanic eruption and a very freak thing happened: half of that island disappeared into the water, disappeared forever....half of it remained. But the half that remained was covered by volcanic ash up to the depth of 100 feet....which simply means that all life was destroyed.

...now it's been scientifically proven that within a single decade the half of that island that remained was covered with green, and growing things!

And how did it happen? In a world that was meant and geared for life, and living means goodness and health -- the wind would waft tiny microscopic bits of infusoria, and other seeds, that fell on that volcanic ash. For a while, how many years I can't tell you, the growing things lasted for less than six hours -- six hours at the most, even though it germinated and had its day... ..insignificant as the time might have been by the hands on the clock -- nitrogen deposits eventually built up so that by the time the decade was over there was the covering of green.

This, too, is parabolic -- the blackness which is evil eventually is covered by the green of God's goodness...and if that were not true, some of us wouldn't want to face another year. And that's another reason why Jesus Christ came into the world -- to prove the goodness of God. * * * * (transcribed as recorded)

THIRTY YEARS PLUS ONE
(Anniversary Sunday)

Grace, mercy, and peace from
God our Father, and from His
Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

When my friend, Doc McLane, died, people were lined up outside the funeral home for almost a block and a half as they waited their turn to step up to his casket and to pay their respects to his grieving widow and to his four youngsters. Had Mary, his wife, been unusually sensitive, I am reasonably certain that she could have found the whole experience a very embittering thing.

Now let me explain that for you a bit.

I have to talk to you now for a little while about Doc himself. There was a time in his life when he wasn't quite sure whether he should become a priest in the Roman Catholic Church, or whether he ought to become a physician. He went to Mt. Saint Mary's in Emmitsburg, where he enrolled for an academic preparation. It was only at Thanksgiving time when the sense of vocation that it should be medicine was made plain to him. But he never lost touch with the sense of spiritual vocation, that he was to be as God's physician to the body.

He interned in the Williamsport Hospital, then he established practice in that community. For thirty years he spent himself freely, ministering to the needs of the people. Oh, when the War came along he was taken,

and then he came back, and the people sensed a great loss but they always knew that one day the War would be ended and they hoped and prayed that Doc would come back, and he did.....

...then one Saturday night, seated in his chair, without any warning whatsoever, he was stricken, and he was taken away.....

As the grieving people in that community stepped up to shake Mary's hand, awkwardly yet very earnestly, they didn't talk about her loss...they didn't grieve for her, nor for the four fatherless children. All they could think about was their loss.....

...he had brought many of them into the world...he had sat by the bedside of a certain number as they breathed their last...he had come to know them so well -- there were patients who came to the back door, there were patients who came to the front door -- there were patients who came by appointment, there were patients who just came by.....
.....there were even some patients that he would call on the phone and say, "You'd better come in now -- you haven't been around for a long while, and you know that attention has to be paid to that ailment of yours."he knew their ailments so well, and their symptoms, real or imagined....

Now you can well afford to see why I've given you this word of explanation, so that you can better understand why they recognized how great was their loss, for they weren't quite certain that they'd ever find another Doc to take his place - - - and I'm not so sure that they have. Doc was there

in that community for three decades. Then he was taken away. And the whole community was overcome with a sense of loss.

Don't hold me responsible for beginning this sermon with what you might deem as a very poor illustration for the sermon now that's to be preached on this Anniversary Sunday. I could not begin this sermon in any other way because of what I'm about to tell you.

For three decades now, plus one year, this congregation has been existing. Suppose by some strange act of fate this would be the last day that we'd ever converge on this place....suppose by some strange act, as of tomorrow morning at 9:00 o'clock, Saint Luke Lutheran Church would no longer be in existence? Within the past three years three different Lutheran congregations in Washington have disbanded. They've closed their doors, they no longer exist as a parish. Suppose that were to happen to us - - what difference would it make? Would you say to yourself, how great is our loss! Would something be taken out of your life that you would find it extremely difficult to replace? On this Anniversary Sunday I feel constrained to talk to you in this way.

Now the sermon has a text, and don't you forget it. The text is the 20th verse of the 18th chapter of the Gospel according to Matthew:

"Where two or three are gathered together
in my name, I am in the midst of them . . ."

That we might fully recognize today just what the Church is, what it's meant to be, what it should stand for, let's ask ourselves two questions:

-- where is the Church? and then,

-- can I sing its praise? -- would I feel its

loss if I were denied it?

Let me answer the first question very quickly and very briefly:

Where Jesus is -- there is the Church!

"Where two or three are gathered, I am there - "

It is Jesus Christ that makes the Church. Properly understood, you and I are here because of our relationship to Him. It is by His Holy Spirit that we are drawn together, and the Church becomes the corporate expression of what we know in and through God through Jesus Christ.

Now, can you sing the praise of the Church? -- can you look upon the Church gratefully? And then if you want to be uncomfortable for a moment, can you sing the praise of this congregation? -- can you look upon this congregation gratefully? Such questions have to be asked, because in the dealing with such questions we might come to a better measure of understanding, either of what we are, or what we are not. How you may answer this question, I do not know, but for the balance of this sermon I rise among you to offer you my testimony as to how I feel about the Church of Jesus Christ, how I happen to feel about this congregation. If my sentiment could be yours, I would be happy indeed.

First of all, I sing the praise of this congregation because I see it linked up with the total cause of Jesus Christ. This congregation does not begin and end in itself. Every time a single New Members Group is formed, those who are looking forward to identifying with this congregation are given to understand in no uncertain way that identification with this congregation means commitment to Jesus Christ. The Church belongs to Jesus Christ. I sing the praise of this congregation because there are those of us who are constantly reminding ourselves of this precious fundamental

truth, that as we constantly look to Him we are girded and sustained and forgiven, and encouraged and empowered to be about His work.

I sing the praise of the cause of Jesus Christ, I sing with gratitude for this congregation, because as I understand it, day in and day out, and week in and week out, it is endeavoring to echo the voice of God. It stands for a religious reading of life. Time and time again pressure is being brought upon us through this congregation to see the thing from the God-perspective...and that's no small matter.

....I was distraught the other day when I read a press release about a book being entitled, "On Taking God Out Of The Dictionary" -- distraught for the simple reason, I think this is indicative of the mind and the mood of our day! For ours is a generation that is deliberately attempting to take God out of the picture. It is being done on practically every level of life. Historians tell us that this is the first time that this has ever been done by a people. Attempts have been made by rulers and kings, attempts have been made by certain leaders in philosophy and in intellectual centers. But by and large, there is a drift among many people to bow God out of the picture completely....

I stand up without any hesitation to sing the praise, gratefully so, of the Church of Jesus Christ and of this congregation as a part of the total picture, because it exists for the primary purpose to talk about God, and to keep God upon the horizon of our thought, and of our life, and of our action, and of our spirit.

For any one who does any kind of reading these days, he is impressed with the fact that the mood of our time is one of despair. As the Church constantly brings us back to the fact of God, we are given a measure of

encouragement and hope. Mark Train, a number of years ago, said something that could have been said this morning by any newscaster. Here is his cynical appraisal of life:

"A myriad of men are born; they labor and sweat and struggle for bread; they squabble and scold and fight; they scramble for little mean advantages over one another. Age creeps upon them. Infirmities follow. Those they love are taken from them. Until at length ambition is dead; pride is dead; longing for release is in their place. It comes at last -- the only unpoisoned gift earth ever had for them -- and they vanish from a world where they were of no consequence."

This is the mood of today, a mood of cynicism and despair. And as over against this, this congregation is constantly reminding you that God who is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is the giver of hope. Whether it's true for you or not, I can tell you from the vantage-point that I have as Pastor, again and ever so often there are numbered among us people who couldn't possibly face another day if it weren't for the Gospel of Hope that's being proclaimed in and through the Church of Jesus Christ and as it's being echoed in and through this congregation.

I sing the praise of the Church of Jesus Christ and I rise with gratitude for this congregation because again and ever so often we're talking about the fundamental necessity of having faith and believing...with those who are young, we give them reason to believe that there are certain things that will hold them in good stead as the rest of life unfolds. Said a Princeton student some time ago as he confessed, "The trouble with me is that I can't believe anything - - I have been taught to question, not to believe. So I never know where to start." Whether you recognize it or not, in and through all that this church teaches and proclaims, we rely so heavily

upon what we have received from the elders in the Faith:

- that God is
- that God is gracious
- that there are certain things that we can believe
about the nature and character of God
- that there are certain things that we can believe
about the nature and character of man
- that there are certain things that we can believe
about the nature and character of the Church
- that there are certain things that we can believe
about the nature and character of this world
- that there are certain things that we can believe
about the nature and the character of the claim
that God makes upon us, not simply to worship,
but also to witness and to work and to demonstrate
in the arena which is life itself the effectiveness
of what we believe.

I believe in the Church, and I believe in this congregation, because she's constantly trying to remind us that we must be in this day as Jesus Christ to the world. You've heard me say it before -- hear me say it again: There's more than one kind of conversion. There is a conversion experience for which a man is brought from the world to Jesus Christ. Then there is a measure of conversion when he is brought through his relationship to Christ into a full appreciation for the Christian Church. Then there is a third phase to that conversion experience, where he is brought to face the world, out of which he has come, as a new man in Jesus Christ, empowered and strengthened through the Church to live in that world.

So I, just as one person, stand at this sacred desk to say a good word for the Church of Jesus Christ, and without any hesitation to say a word, gratefully so, for this congregation.

If Saint Luke Church were not to exist after 10:00 o'clock tomorrow morning, I myself, as one individual, would find myself much poorer indeed. For something that has come to me in and through a relationship with you in the name of Jesus Christ would be taken away. Not that it's confined to this people and to this place alone, but it has come through you.

My own personal life would be diminished....something would be taken away from the life of my family, my wife and I together would feel a very great loss. And now as one who stands before you as a grandparent -- how sad indeed I would be to see those two boys denied what I honestly believe this church stands for under the grace of God.

A good time to appreciate anything is while you have it.

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"SHE WEARS A CROSS"

Some of us, O God, just can't get along without it. Again and ever so often we have to find our way to a holy place, where it's made easier to think Your thoughts. That's why we've come here, just for a little while, now. Perhaps we can give You undivided attention, that we might not miss You in the world beyond these doors. Through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

As most of you know, this is the day when we have done what we have already done. We have formally inducted another Parish Deaconess. Of all the congregations in the Lutheran Church in America, we are numbered among the fortunate ones who can have the service of a Parish Deaconess. The sermon, then, ought to be in keeping with the occasion, and as you may or may not have noted, the sermon has a title, and if you please, a very apt title: "She Wears A Cross."

The sermon, as every good sermon, ought to have a text. This is no exception. There is a text. But remember it well, please. I'll give you your choice of translations -- I've reached out for six different ones. Significantly enough, the words are quite different -- no one set of words is exactly like the set of words in the other translations, yet there is perfect identification with substance and meaning.

In Paul's Second Letter to the Corinthians, the 5th chapter, the 14th verse:

"The love of Christ constraineth us . . ."

- - "The love of Christ," says another translator, "controls us."
 - - says J. B. Phillips, one of my favorites, "The very spring of our actions is the love of Christ"
 - - now how about this one -- brace yourselves! -- the new English Bible puts it this way: "The love of Christ leaves us no choice"!
 - - another translator says, "The love of Christ overwhelms us."
 - - still another: "For we are ruled by Christ's love for us."
- ...there it is -- constrains...controls...overwhelms...rules
...becomes the spring of all our actions...leaves us no choice....

You know, don't you, that this is the text that personifies the Diaconate. This is the reason for being, that a woman gives her life to the Lord Jesus Christ in service in the church.

There's a reason for everything that's done. This is her reason. Let me make this as perfectly clear as I can. There's no question in my mind of what it is that a deaconess ought to be, the embodiment of this text. I honestly believe that while God calls all of us through baptism, as children in His service, every single Christian is a called Christian - - but yet with equal fervor I maintain that God has those to whom He whispers in the ear, to whom He may speak as He does not speak to others, on whose shoulder He may lay a kind of pressure that He may not put on the shoulder of other people. He calls them into a special kind of ministry. This I most certainly believe.

In the Church it is beautifully and magnificently expressed in the Diaconate, where a woman can know in her heart that Christ is calling her

to be as one who serves, and to live out the days of her years in response to that love which has claimed her.

I know that not everyone thinks of the Diaconate in the idealistic terms that I do, or in terms of the ideal. But I honestly believe in my own heart that a man lives by the ideals that claim him. There are certain standards that ought to be put in front of us, that motivate us, dynamically, as living witnesses for Christ.

If you will permit me, as on occasion you have, to a bit of autobiography, my first introduction to what it is to be a deaconess was related to me by my father and my mother. My father, as you know, came from the Old Country as a teenager. My mother was married as a teenager -- I think she was barely sixteen when she gave birth to her first child....shy, frightened a bit -- her family was in Massachusetts. She had her first baby in the Williamsport, Pennsylvania, hospital.....no kin-folk around to comfort and console her. But a deaconess, of the Episcopal Church, came and sat up all night with that frightened teenager about to give birth to her first child. Why did she do it? --- for her it could be said, as is being said now: The love of Christ -- dictates this kind of action. The love of Christ compels a person to freely, willingly minister compassionately to somebody else.

Now there are any number of us who wish perhaps that we could do it. But maybe we have a kind of encumbrance because we have responsibilities elsewhere. So the Diaconate comes along and says to a woman, here is your opportunity -- freely, willingly you can give yourself to the service of the Lord through His Church. And that's exactly what a deaconess does! A deaconess, properly understood, says, I ask only one thing: let me serve. I give my life to this.

That's why it was a very proper thing that as our new Parish Deaconess knelt in the shadow of the altar, a prayer was being offered, sung, in these words - - let me read them for you now:

"Saviour, thee my heart I tender,
And would yield myself to thee;
All my powers to thee surrender,
Thine and only thine to be.
Send me, Lord, where thou wilt send me,
Only do thou guide my way;
May thy grace through life attend me,
Gladly then shall I obey.

Let me do thy will or bear it;
I would know no will but thine;
Shouldst thou take my life or spare it,
I that life to thee resign.
Thine I am, O Lord, for ever,
To thy service set apart;
Suffer me to leave thee never;
Seal thine image on my heart. Amen.

I for one have always maintained that it's a shameful thing not to fully appreciate what you may have right in front of you at the present moment. I honestly believe that life is so constituted that eventually what is valid will be recognized. But alas and alack, it may take some measure of time, and only as a person looks back does he see what he actually had. Why do I say that to you? For this reason: that when the historian of Saint Luke Church, five or six decades from now, looks back, and records the life and the spirit, the work of this congregation in 1971, the historian may say, "O yes, January 24 -- that was the time when the congregation inducted their third Parish Deaconess - - "

...you see, we have been fortunate. First there was Sister Mary Josephine Gouker; then Sister Dorothy Marie Stalder, who took leave of absence from the Diaconate

in order to go home and minister to those
who are flesh-of-her-flesh and blood-of-her-blood,
and properly so.....and now, Sister Mildred.

And it could be that five or six decades from now (God forbid!) -- that somebody would have to say to the historian: "And what is a deaconess?"

...the supply, you know, here in the States, is dwindling....
But if somebody should have to ask: "What is a deaconess?" - - then there might be those who would remember what she was like, and what she did in our midst! And it could all be wrapped up in the expression of a verse of Scripture: The love of Christ constrained her to serve. And what is this except to say that in her life there was meaning and in her life there was truth. For her there was a dynamic that thrust her, and sustained her.

It may surprise the Parish Deaconesses who are here, it may surprise you a bit, if in connection with this sermon I should quote from the Rolling Stones, but here it is:

"Everywhere I hear the sound of marching, charging
feet, Boy,
Because summer's here, and the time is right for
fighting in the street, Boy."

...the lyric triggers a thought or two, naturally, none perhaps as pervasive as this: What lies behind it all, this restlessness, this marching, this charging of the feet? A man must be driven, motivated by something, you know. Could the awesome truth be that there is no satisfying motivation, since seemingly there are no satisfying results? So the Rolling Stones have put it, a mirror held up to reflect a generation...."Everywhere I hear the sound of the marching, charging feet" - - what comes of it? Ask any number of people and the answer you dread to hear comes, unhesitatingly: Nothing.

Last December a professor of art at the Free University of Amsterdam, H. R. Ruchmacher, published a book entitled, "Modern Art And The Death of A Culture." Here's his conclusion at one point: "We can look to the answers of modern art, but they tell us that everything is rotten, nothingness, putrid, empty, senseless. But where is beauty, where is truth? We searched for the answer, and they told us LOVE....LOVE....LOVE....and love was tried, and exhausted we found that LOVE, LOVE, LOVE meant SEX, SEX, SEX....and that nothing has changed." So the marching, the charging, it goes on. And all of us are caught up in it. What is wrong?

Ruchmacher goes on to maintain in his book that the real matters of life and death are reduced to sentiment, or adventure, or crime, or violence, or cruelty, without any sort of judgment expressed. The sad thing is that there is no moral frame of reference, and God is kept out of the picture completely.

The Deaconesses will also be surprised when I call as evidence now at the sacred desk the words of a man who was an atheist, a professing atheist for over half a century, Bertrand Russell. When he was 80 years of age somebody asked him what he thought was the most important asset that a man could have in his life. Russell answered, "The root of the matter is a very simple and old-fashioned thing, a thing so simple that I'm almost ashamed to mention it, for fear of the derisive smile with which wise cynics will greet my words. The thing I mean (please forgive me for mentioning it) is love -- Christian love, that is. If you feel this, you have a motive for existence, a guide in action, a reason for courage, an imperative necessity for intellectual honesty. And although you may not find happiness, you will never know the despair of those whose life is aimless and void of purpose . . ." -- so spoke the Christian

atheist, in support of Christian love.

Now let it be said again -- let's recognize what we have in our midst: a person who has come and said, "By the grace of God, I want to minister to people."

...the other day when I dialed her number -- JU 5-8495 -- if these were not the exact words, at least the tone indicated the words...as the receiver was lifted:

"Sister Mildred speaking. Can I help you?"

To have no greater loyalty than her devotion to Christ; to hold no joy or privilege above what is known through His service; to know what it is to be strengthened just because one gives herself so completely; to believe that the providence of God is unfailing; to live in order to love . . . this then is what it means to be a deaconess!

...and to think we're fortunate
to have another!

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"FALSE FACE"

Grace, mercy and peace from God
our Father and from His Son,
Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

As I was waiting the other day in the barber shop, I whiled away a few moments by going through the pages of MAD Magazine. There was my old friend (and yours, I dare say, as well), Alfred E. Newman. He appears in a variety of poses in this recent issue, at least 10 or 12 different characterizations.....there he is as Benjamin-for-Franklin Newman.....on another page, Napoleon-for-Bonaparte Newman.....so it went on. It was cleverly done, indded, and each was intended to be a portrait much like the original character himself -- only with a distinctive Newman touch.

In the same issue there was a series of episodes dealing with the well-known TV character, Hazel -- in print she's labeled as Hazey. The surrounding cast appear on the pages, alright, but this time the cartoonist has done a very unusual thing. He's drawn there their own faces with which we are accustomed to seeing them, and then each has in front of his own face a false face -- a face not quite like the original...and then underneath, as you might suppose, he has the lines that are being spoken according to each face. The real face is saying one thing....the not-so-genuine face is saying something else.

It was intended to be amusing. And yet the longer I pondered, it's a rather weird thing - - a man to have held in front of him a false face, and

then to have depicted, so that all may see as they read, that there is not a genuine connection between the two, for as the faces may appear differently, so the lines appear differently, and one speaks according to his face.

As I reflected upon this, I've discovered a parable for contemporary man and I ask myself the question in your presence: could it be that man wears two faces, this man who is part of our world today -- could it be that you wear two faces? Could it be that you're never quite sure who you are, and it's only as you speak that your lines indicate what you think, and what you really are? Could it be that each of us has a real face and a not-so-real face? -- that we would wittingly or unwittingly reveal to our friends and our associates? Could it be that there is one face we wear when we're at home, another face we wear when we're at work?

...could it be that there is one face that we show to
our superiors, and another face that we reveal to
those who are under us?

...could it be that if we could get away with it, there
would be one face that we'd show to God, and another
face that we'd look at when we stood in front of the
mirror?

Be that as it may, could this be the parable of contemporary man, that he has two faces -- one real, and the other not so real? And then the question must be asked: can he discern for himself just which is the real face? Maybe this is contemporary man's greatest problem, maybe the hang-up of hang-ups for today is this: the problem of identification....just who am I?

Upon reflection it occurs to me that there are people who keep returning to this place, this House of God, where an altar has been raised and where certain things happen that do not happen any other place in the course of the week, and where we say certain things to each other that we are not accustomed to saying to other people that we may meet, Monday through Saturday.....and that some of us keep returning to this place because this is the one hour of the week when we do get some idea of who we really are. And if we stand in front of the great mirror which is God, to all intents and purposes the reflection that we might get is a genuine one.

As I read the pages of the Old Testament, I continue to be fascinated by that exceedingly wonderful chapter which the very first chapter in the Bible, that deals with God making things at the very beginning. Verse after verse, you come and you recognize that God did this and God did that, and God made this and God made that.....and then, the crowning glory of all creation, which I submit to you perhaps could be the greatest of all verses in the Old Testament. For certainly there is no truth quite as significant as this one, as I announce the text for this sermon, the 26th verse of the first chapter of Genesis:

"God said, Let us make man in our image;
after our likeness."

Some of us keep coming back to this place because here we are reminded of what our real nature and character was meant to be. Whatever face by which we may be known to the world, whatever face we may give to the world, here, if a man is honest with himself, he encounters the real lines which

were meant to be drawn, meant to become the features of his face and of his personality. God said, Let us make man in our image, in our likeness. Let there be clearly stamped upon the face of man the divine imprimatur, so that feature after feature reflects something of the divine nature and character. To nothing that God made did God say this except to man -- only to man in the order of all created things did God say, "You will be made in My image....you will be made in my likeness."

So then, if you were to ask the question, what then is man's real face? -- the answer would be, a face that reflects, that resembles the divine. For man at the very beginning was made to resemble God.

But now, quickly I ask you: are these the features that you discern quickly in your own face, or in the face of your fellow man?

..where are the features of truth?

..where are the features of love?

..where are the features of compassion?

...for these become the nature and the character of God, and these are meant to become the nature and the character of your face and of my face. But honestly now, they're scarcely discernible.

Let the face of man be drawn by the contemporary artist, and all too often you find nothing but traces of envy, fear, hostility, hatred, murder. And this was not the way God intended it. And any time any man, anywhere, shows this kind of face, as far as God's concerned it's a false face that he's wearing -- the face that he has raised to his own face that God had never intended.

God intended us to act and to treat one another as God Himself treats us, out of respect and reverence, consideration and compassion. You may

say that I am drawing the line quite severely, but nonetheless there are moments when we need to have the line drawn quite severely. It may not become a generalization, and maybe it only deals with the specific, but the overtone and the intimation remains. Years ago I read about a beloved priest in a village in France who stayed there year after year in an almost impossible situation, because he was convinced that he was God's man to those people, and he was meant to labor and to live among them, hoping that day by day something of the image of God might come out a little bit sharper. He had so little to show for his earnest effort. Listen now as I detail for you just one chapter in his life....

...in that village there was one man whose growth and development had never matched the growth and development of other people -- he never had quite as much as they had to begin with. He lived out the days of his years as a retarded one....

...his features were not unusually attractive, and his manner was awkward. And all that they could do, some of those townspeople, was to make fun of him and to taunt him. And if they couldn't ridicule him for what he appeared to be, then ugly characters that they were, they ridiculed his sister by saying, "Her lovers pay a franc apiece...her lovers pay a franc apiece..." One day he fought back -- never a match for them, of course. And they left his body, dead.

..it was the beloved priest of the village who found it out. He went down, found the limp character and with his strong arms made stronger still by divine love, he lifted the dead body and carried him on his own shoulders to the village church....and he

placed his body at the foot of the altar. Then he rang the church bell, so that men and women in the village, hearing the ringing of the bell, might head for the church door. And so they came, not knowing why the bell was being rung in this particular case....only out of habit they came to the church when the bell was rung.

...and as they gathered together, the beloved priest preached a sermon to those who were there. Somewhere in his sermon he said, "One day I will stand before the Bar of Judgment, and God, who is the lover of all men will say to me:

'Pastore de la Rouderre, where are thy sheep?

-- I gave them to your keeping - - '"

...the village priest went on to answer his own question by saying, "When such a question is put to me in the Day of Judgment, I shall not answer my Lord. But my Lord will not be satisfied and again and again He will ask me,

'Pastore de la Rouderre, where are thy sheep?'

..then when I can remain silent no longer," the pastor said, "I will say to Him, 'Lord, they were not sheep. They were a vicious pack of wolves! That's the way they treat one another!'"

The line is drawn severely, of course it is, but on occasion, perhaps when God looks down from Heaven above, this is the way He may characterize our behavior, for surely the traces of love, truth and compassion may not be easily discernible to Him. Said Martin Luther, "The image of God upon the face of man has not only been defaced but also effaced." Martin Luther was so washed up with human nature that he allowed himself to believe that man no longer reflected the divine, but only satanic influences....so con-

vinced was he of the fallen-ness of human nature. And of course he got it from his progenitor in the faith, Augustine himself.

God said, "let's make man in our image --
let this be his true face, let this be
his genuine character."

It's hypothetical, I presume, but somebody was heard putting a question to a distinguished teacher of the Torah: "Tell me, wise man, why is it, when I go to Genesis and the account of the Creation, after each thing has been created in order, God said, "It is good" except in the case of man! - - because while God said, "Let's make man in our image, after our likeness," He does not add, "And it was good."

It could well be that not until the day of Jesus Christ should appear on the scene, that God would ever be able to say, "This is good -- this, now, is the personification of the true face of God in man." And my friend, herein lies our hope. We may deface and we may efface the divine image, but Jesus Christ, God's new man, has come to us. Jesus Christ sees us, not for what we are but for what we can become and what we were meant to be. And He spent the days of His years always trying to tear away layer after layer of encrustment of hate and envy and jealousy, until perhaps He might come to the real core of love and truth by which man was made at the beginning...

It was all spelled out quite clearly at the very beginning: man was meant to resemble God. But man, not long after the beginning had another idea: he'd much prefer to look so very much just like himself. And from that day to this he's done quite a job of wiping away most of the divine features - - yet never quite succeeding!

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"ON BEING GOOD - FOR NOTHING"

Through Jesus Christ, Thy Son,
our Lord. Amen.

In that Bible reading of yours, don't ever sell short the book of Job. It's a classic on any count. For style and expression it is absolutely superb. When it comes to development and presentation of its theme, there are few pieces in all literature that can compare with it. Let's take a quick look now at its beginning chapter. It could hold us in good stead as background material for this sermon.

The first five verses are spent in the immediate introduction of the book's chief character, a man with an unusual name, a man named Job. At once we're given to understand that he's a #1 sort of person, a first-rate chap. The writer does not hesitate for a single moment to call him "the greatest of all the men in the east." Now, that's quite a compliment.

We are all the more impressed, particularly so since according to those first few verses, the ground of his greatness is established as his goodness. It's pointed out that despite all his holdings -- (he was a very wealthy man) -- he never forgot his obligation to his family, and he never forgot his obligation to God.

There was something very remarkable about Job....even after his sons had grown into adulthood and established families of their own, he still had a continuing interest in them, and to a very great degree still held himself responsible for their moral and spiritual and ethical behavior. If

I read properly those first five verses in the beginning chapter of the book of Job, I can see how at least once a year his sons would have a family gathering, and they'd invite their father to attend. Job, because he was the kind of man that he was, turned it into a religious occasion, and before he went home -- can't you just see how he gathered them together?...and he offered a very special prayer, asking God to have mercy upon his sons and his family, if by any chance they had not conducted themselves as they should have conducted themselves since they last met together. Now that's the kind of a man that Job was. The writer of the book of Job also alludes to him in this manner, saying that "he was a man who feared God and turned his heart away from evil."

Then begins the sixth verse of the book of Job.

And here we're introduced to the fact that a very unusual thing is taking place. I don't know that you'll find much like this anywhere else in the Bible. God himself is confronted by a group of people who come to Him. For the most part they are His angels, His representatives. But included in the lot is the Devil himself. Now at this part in the introductory chapter, God is confronted by these representatives. And sooner or later God and the Devil meet, and they carry on a kind of dialogue.

As you read those opening verses for yourself, with whatever sanctified imagination you may have, you can picture it going something like this:

...God looks at the Devil, and when God looks at the Devil
He discovers a strange look on the Devil's face -- so much so
that God is prompted to say to the Devil: "What have you been
doing lately?...where have you been? what have you been up to?"

...and the Devil rather smugly replies: "Oh, I have
been working...going up and down the earth -- in fact - - "

... and that's about all you have of the dialogue in the book of Job itself.

But you can read between the lines. And if you understand anything of the mind of God at all, it's at this point that you discover that maybe God is saying to Himself, "I don't like the look upon the Devil's face, because it's something of a sneer. For the Devil wants me to understand that things are not really as well as I would like them to be on earth...."

...you could have read that on the Devil's face. For the Devil had discovered that we're rather a wicked lot, and we haven't been up to much good. And I suppose if the Devil wanted to go on with the dialogue with Almighty God, he might have said to Him:

"You don't have as many real followers as you think you have. You ought to see what I do - - "

...and then in your sanctified imagination, allow it to lay hold upon that passage of Scripture where presumably God, with His back to the wall, pressed by Satan, God says to the Devil: "But have you considered my servant Job?"....as though deeply gratified in being able to say, "Well after all, there is Job. I have been able to count on him . . ."

And by this time you should have a good picture of Job because the opening verses of the first chapter of Job tell you what a fine man he is. So in the dialogue God says to the Devil: "All right, you've made your point. Let me remind you, there is Job."

...and then the Devil counters, as much as to say,
"Come off of it, God -- do you think for a single minute that Job is good for nought? - - God, look what a favorable position he has -- he's a wealthy man! he's

fairly reaching for the stars! he's got everything going for him! Why shouldn't he be good?"...that classic expression in that first chapter in the book of Job, the 9th verse in fact, which serves as the text for this sermon: "And then Satan answered the Lord, Does Job fear God for nought?"

Do you happen to remember how God answered him? At first blush you won't be very happy with the kind of answer that God gave to him...as much as to say, "Alright Satan, I'll tell you what. You want to make something of this? Go ahead. Put him to the test. Don't you dare touch Job himself."

Does that whet your appetite now to want to read the rest of the book? I dare you to do it. It will tear your heart out at points, because episode after episode you discover what happens to Job. The Devil has a field day. His wealth is taken away, and his family. His own physical health deteriorates until he's left practically naked. That's the way it goes on, episode after episode. And now you still have ringing in your ears the words of the Devil to God, "Alright, let me ask you this, God - - is Job good for nothing? - - will he fear you for nought?".....

...as much as to insinuate, "He's good alright, because of what he's getting out of it."

Now let me pose for you the question that's sometimes thrown at us preachers. There are people who tell us that we Christians are what we are, trying to be good in God's sight, because of what we're going to get out of it! No sooner is a child baptized, as an example, then what we talk about the gift of eternal life -- there's something in this thing. So we baptize children because of the promise.

Did I ever tell you that H. G. Wells didn't have too much time for Christians? He got fed up with them. He thought us Christians a very selfish lot. He said, look at the way you pray! -- most of your prayers are prayers in which you are always asking God for something, for yourself! - for somebody who is very dear to you for whom you have concern. And then he looked at our hymnbooks (I don't know what hymnbook he happened to pick up, but he did say according to the hymnbook that he picked up, presumably) - that any number of the hymns dealt with me and my -- the emphasis not on praising Almighty God but on what they want God to do for them, even when they sing His praise! Add then H. G. Wells went on to say, "You're always being good because of the way you want to be treated by God in this world, and also because of what you hope you'll get when you die -- Heaven itself." H. G. Wells -- he thought he'd have a great deal more respect for Christians if he could find just a bunch of Christians who might be good...for nothing! Not for what they would get out of it.

Surely it's a rare soul who chooses as a favorite hymn one whose 4th and 5th stanzas read like this:

"How can I choose but love thee, God's dear Son,
O Jesus, loveliest, and most loving One!
Were there no heaven to gain, no hell to flee,
For what thou art alone I must love thee.

Not for the hope of glory or reward,
But even as thyself hast loved me, Lord,
I love thee, and will love thee and adore,
Who art my King, my God, for evermore. "

That may not be a hymn that would come out on the top ten in a popularity contest, because maybe there aren't too many of us who talk to God like that, that we're going to love Him just because He is, because of the kind of person He is. Maybe we'd much rather clutch to our own hearts

and minds what I memorized as a youngster, going off to the weekday school of Christian education:

"Blessed is the man that walketh not in the
counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the
way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of
the scornful.
But his delight is in the law of the Lord;
and in his law doth he meditate day and
night.
And he shall be like a tree planted by the
rivers of water, that bringeth forth his
fruit in his season;
His leaf also shall not wither, and whatso-
ever he doeth shall prosper.
The ungodly are not so, but are like the
chaff which the wind driveth away."

...that's the kind of language we'd much rather use -- that's the thought pattern we'd much rather hold dear to our hearts.... "Okay, God, we'll serve you, but just you keep promising to us that as long as we serve you, there'll always be a bank balance"..."and a thousand shall fall at thy right hand, and ten thousand that shall not come nigh thee" - - - is this the kind of a person we are?

I wouldn't give much for any man who came to church on Sunday and offered his prayer just because he honestly believed that if he came the orders would flow in on Monday by six o'clock in the afternoon -- not that a man doesn't have a right to ask God to bless his business efforts. I have my moments when I wish that I had some stock that brought that good a return, and sometimes far more than a fervent wish! But I wouldn't give much for a man who turned to God simply for what he could get out of it -- just as you wouldn't give much for a son or a daughter of yours who was good to you in order that they might bleed you -- exploit that relationship.

Yet on the other hand, I am not about to discredit or discount anyone who doesn't allow himself a tremendous satisfaction and joy in knowing the

goodness that does come to him because he does love and serve the Lord. Let's be honest with ourselves: there's something wrong with our being here right now if by the time the Benediction has been pronounced you haven't gotten something good out of it. I would be very happy indeed to be coming back to this place because of the blessing that's guaranteed just because you do happen to obey the Lord, and keep His day holy, and find yourself in the company of the faithful.

At the conclusion of this service I will hold a child in the crook of my arm and I will name that child for Jesus Christ. I would be very happy indeed if those parents, to the end of their days, could remember with tremendous satisfaction the good that comes from having done this, that this child is named for God, that this child now has a relationship with God Himself.

There are any number of people on the face of the earth who are trying to do our best to provide that child with Christian nurture and guidance and direction. Would you believe me, that I would hope that even when you bring your gift to the altar, and you fill your offering envelopes, that you might thank God for good that flows into your heart because you've done that? - - the measure of satisfaction that should be allowed to you because you know that there's no end to the good that might come from what you've done? A man has a right to feel good about these things, because they are as precious as all that.

Now back to the book of Job. The Devil had his day. This thing and that thing was taken away from him, until he was stripped naked...a naked soul before God. All he had was the remnant of his faith that had its

triumphant moment, when Job was able to say, when everything was taken away - - "I know that my Redeemer lives." And if that isn't reason enough for wanting to be good, then I don't know what is.

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

Prayer - Pastor Raymond Shaheen
February 7, 1971

THIS IS not the first prayer, O God, that we offered to you this day, for some of us, even our waking thoughts were thoughts of prayer by which we gave You thanks for the blessings of the past night and the gift of a brand new day.

THIS IS not the first prayer that we've offered to you this day, O God, for numbered among Thy people are those who even as they came to church, came in the mind and the mood of prayer, that long before they sat down their souls were already being made ready because of what they had already received through their communion with You.

THIS IS not the first prayer that we've offered to You this day, O God, in this place. Scarcely had our service begun than we turned to You with a prayer for pardon, asking You to forgive us, and to grant us all over again the gift of eternal life.

HOW CAN we choose but thank Thee, O God, how can we choose but love Thee. For we are being made increasingly mindful of what we receive at Your hand, and what no one can take away because it does bear Your stamp.

NOW as we go our separate ways, no matter where our paths may take us, and no matter what it may be by which we shall be confronted in the days of the coming week, enable us always to remember what we do have, and what has come to us, just because we have called upon the name of the Lord. Let no one go from this holy place, O God, without taking with him the realization that he belongs to God and that God belongs to him and that nothing can break that bond because of what God is, despite what we do.

O GOD, as we go away from this place, hear our prayer of thanksgiving for this congregation, for what it has come to mean to so many of us, not only in this community but in different parts of the world.

O GOD, Hear our parting prayer for Thy Church throughout the world, and especially for those who witness in Thy name in difficult places.

OUR FATHER.....

"GOD'S ESCAPE ROUTE"
(I Corinthians 10:13)

Just for a little while, O God, the minutes may pass quickly, give us a chance to think about You, Your way and Your truth, right now. Through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

A well-known writer of a few years ago was never more of a rascal than when he recklessly advised: "The only way to get rid of a temptation is to yield to it." Ask anyone who has heeded such advice to recite for you his tale of woe, and enough will be said to curse the name of Oscar Wilde forever. What Oscar Wilde recommended has brought ruin to more than one life.

So let's concern ourselves now with the safe and certain route which we ought to take in the time of temptation. That's why the text for today's meditation should hold us in good stead. It was designated on the front page of this week's MESSENGER. In all likelihood you didn't look it up, and because that could be true, let me read it for you right now, that it may fall upon your ears as fresh as this very moment itself. You'll find it recorded as I Corinthians, the 10th chapter and the 13th verse:

"No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your strength, but with the temptation will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it."

Well, you've caught the idea at once, haven't you? This is to be a

sermon dealing with temptation.

Let's glance quickly now at the historical situation that brought this text about. There was this man Paul, and he was a preacher. He earned his living by mending tents. But God had laid hold upon him, and he had to spend his energy otherwise, talking to people about Jesus Christ. Wherever he went he banded people together and formed congregations. He was a real missionary.

He was also a good bishop. He never quite forgot about the people with whom he had established a relationship in the name of Christ. Sometimes he planned journies and he'd go back and visit them, and hold special meetings and talk to them, meet with their leaders, discuss their problems. On some occasions, when he wasn't able to meet them, they remembered him. And if they had a problem, they sent a messenger to this man Paul. And the messenger would come and tell about the situation in this community and that community. If he could get back to them, he'd pay a return visit, and do his best to straighten them out in the problems that seemed to vex and to irritate them. More often, however, he wouldn't be able to get back, so he'd do the next best thing - he'd write them a letter.

Now that's about the way you can look at the historical setting for today's text. There was a group of people who were Christians who were living in Corinth. Now Corinth was not a very good city. It was, in fact, a very wicked city. You name the sin -- and you could practice it any day -- very freely -- without any embarrassment, in the city of Corinth. Gross immorality was everywhere evident.

Now this handful of Christians were perplexed. They felt as though the deck was stacked against them, and while Christians in other communities

might find it easier to be a Christian, they found it exceedingly difficult to practice the Christian religion in a wicked city. So they got that word to the Apostle Paul, asking him if he couldn't say something to them about their situation....hoping, of course, that Paul might write back and say, "Well, I've gotten around myself. I've been in Corinth. I've heard the things about Corinth -- it is a wicked city. I know all about it. And maybe we just ought to set our minds at this point and not expect quite as much from you as we might expect from Christians who live in a more ideal situation. Now if this will ease your minds any, why don't you do the best you can, in the face of the circumstances that surround you. . "

...but that isn't the way he wrote. Because that isn't the way Paul thought. He wrote back and said:

"Why don't you face it--no matter where you might go, you're going to be tempted - - why don't you face it! There is no temptation coming your way but what is common to any man anywhere."

Well, that's the first thing that you and I ought to say about temptation. It is an experience common to every man. Life treats most of us pretty much the same, but here and there a man will stand up and say that his case is an exception. But where is the man anywhere who will stand up and deny the common experience of temptation? It comes to all of us in one way or another, and most of us are unable to cope with it. So this is the first thing that has to be said about temptation - - no man escapes it.

Now you may ask me why God should so allow us to run our course in this life that we could not serve Him freely and gladly without the possibility of falling.....I might have to tell you that when God made us He made us with the freedom of the will. In order to do right and to have it become a significant experience, there must always be the possibility of doing the wrong thing. And that's where temptation enters the picture. When a man is being tempted in this sense of the word, he is always wrestling with the possibility of being less than what he could be in God's sight. There is always that possibility. And it comes to every single person.

Within a Sunday or two we'll be facing the first Sunday in Lent, and the Gospel lesson assigned for the First Sunday in Lent deals with that very remarkable temptation experience in the life of our Blessed Lord -- even Jesus Christ did not escape the possibility of being tempted. And while you and I may read that 4th chapter of the Gospel according to Matthew and think that this was just one episode in His life and that was all there was to it, we're mistaken. Because I am in duty bound to remind you that that temptation episode recorded there in the 4th chapter of Matthew reads in this manner:

"And then the devil leaves him for a season - "
...which means that the Devil came back.

There are some Biblical scholars and students in the life of Jesus Christ who tell us that Jesus Christ was being plagued by the Tempter all the way to the Cross, and even that experience in the Garden of Gethsemane, where Jesus Christ falls upon His knees and asks if there isn't any other way out, that

this in itself was a temptation episode.

You may remember that we've had some Good Friday preachers stand here at this sacred desk, and when they come to one of those Words from the Cross, "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" -- when Jesus Christ quotes Scripture, cries out like this -- there are some students who interpret this that we might believe that the human Christ, hanging upon the Cross, about to die for us, in His dying moments still had to deal with the temptation to doubt the full, perfect and complete plan of God for His life. No man anywhere -- at any time -- escapes the possibility of being tempted. Let's get that established squarely in our minds.

If a man should be fortunate enough to have everything go well for him, he may not have the kind of temptation that a man has who is constantly being disadvantaged. The temptation experience then, and that leads me to say the second thing about it, while it is something that we all have in common, the nature and the character of the experience itself may differ according to the person. Our temptations come to us according to our temperament, according to our personality, according to our goals and objectives in life. The Devil may tempt me in a way that he may never think of tempting you. And what you may have to wrestle with -- even while you are in church right now!...(because there's nothing sacred in the Devil's eye)...what you may have to wrestle with right now, in the face of temptation, may be nothing that he'll ever throw in front of me. Our temptations vary, according to our temperament, according to our personalities, according to our goals and according to our objectives.....and every now and then, if you'll allow me to say it, according to the circum-

stances in which we happen to find ourselves...

...some men have never been tempted to steal a thousand dollars because they were never where a thousand dollars happened to be within ready grasp....but who knows how strong the temptation might be if that could happen to have been their particular circumstance?

"There is no temptation that has come to you except that it is common to every man.".....wouldn't it be a terrible thing if this was all I had to say to you? if the sermon would stop at this point? But it doesn't. The Apostle Paul went on to say:

"But God is faithful, and He won't allow
you to be tempted beyond your strength"

...now there's a good word for you!

"And God will also find for you a way of
escape . . ."

Take heart, my friend, God says tempted you may become. Succumb? You don't have to. Why? Because, says the Apostle Paul, God will always be around. He will faithfully stand by you.

I used to think -- and maybe I'll go on thinking it, I'm not certain -- but it's always easier to do the wrong thing than it is to do the right thing.....so stained are we by original sin. But that is not to be understood as permitting any man to believe that when he finds it easier to do the wrong thing, that God isn't going to throw hurdles in his way. And any man who has any kind of conscience at all knows how quickly those guilt feelings set in, once one is about to succumb to the temptation experience

itself. And what is that but evidence that God's within reach? What is that except God saying to us: "It's a no-no." God never says no-no without stretching His hand out and saying, "This way - - "

But you know it just as well as I: the temptation experience can be so perfectly pleasurable, so downright delightful. And you and I have our moments when we're not about to look in God's direction, and we're not about to allow His outstretched hand to grasp our shoulder and turn us around! Even Augustine, one of the greatest of all the Church Fathers, who committed practically every sin in the book, in his CONFESSIONS admits that he had his moments when he cried out, "God save me! -- but not tonight!" So when you and I can be that honest with God.

But what else needs to be said? We have to constantly remind ourselves that there is an escape route, and sometimes that route has to be taken suddenly, and we can't afford to tarry. Up in that quiet spot in Pennsylvania where I have my study shack, rough and rugged as it is, I've added a bit of color here and there on the walls....

...I've taken old Holiday magazines and have some pictures of the first Ford automobile in full color....pictures from the Dearborn Museum..
...then on the south side I have a calendar that I brought back from Nepal advertising the Royal Nepalese Airline -- you'd think they had a fleet of marvelous carriers, they only had DC3's at that time, but when you want to get through the Himalayas you thank God for them.....a memento here and a memento there.....

...but right inside the door when you enter, there's a photograph in full color of an aircraft that was flown by one of the boys, a member of this congregation, single-seater, of course, and at that time it was the fastest thing on wings that the United States Air Force had ever known.

In a conversation with the man who was flying that plane, he told me that the designer had thought of everything -- there was the plan of ejection. Suppose in that sudden moment when nothing but danger was ahead, he had only to press a button, and then the plexiglass or whatever it is, the hood overhead of him, opens up -- an explosive thrust ejects him and his seat, and he's complete free from his craft. Perhaps coming down heavy with his fist, he frees himself from the seat, and then by a jerk with his hand, the chute opens.....all of this is done in the matter of split seconds. This is an escape route. He cannot afford to tarry, he cannot afford to delay. To remain in the face of that certain peril would mean death.

Would you believe it that this is a parable? In the face of the certain peril that you and I have confronting us, there does come that moment when drastic action has to be taken. And the escape route must be followed -- immediately -- without delay. That's what God wants us to know. He's there to show us the way, if we will let Him.

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"AN ADEQUATE PHILOSOPHY OF LIFE"

Life presses in upon us, O God, in so many ways, and there is so little time to be made quiet, that we might give undivided attention to the things of God. Let that happen now, even in this time that we have set aside for so holy a purpose. Through Jesus Christ, Thy Son our Lord. Amen.

One night this past week I read a book from cover to cover at one sitting. 'Twas nothing, honestly now, because it was only a paper-back and didn't quite number 80 pages. I mention the rapid reading, however, because I felt that I just couldn't take the book away from my hands until I finished reading it. I was attracted to it by its title: "Teenage World, Its Crises and Its Anxieties."

I was also attracted to the book because I had read some other things written by its author, a very able chap, one of Roman Catholicism's ablest sociologists, Fr. Andrew Greeley. I was glad that before I started reading the book on the inside, that I had given attention to what I found on the back cover of the book. For there somebody had said in words such as these: "Father Greeley knows what he's talking about. He is still young, in years and in spirit - he's spent the greater part of his life and his energy working among those who are young. Out of his experience, in this book he tells it as it is, and what the reader will discover will not be very reassuring to the adult world."

I'm glad I had that preparation before I came to Page 17. Now if you'll indulge me for the moment, let me read for you an extract or two from Page 17...

...oh, you'll say to yourself, I've heard this before - - a good percentage of you will react that way....and so have I. But nonetheless, there was a kind of impact made this time that left me quite uncomfortable, and with a great deal of food for thought. I may stop somewhere in the extract and let you know just what it was that really put me on the edge of my seat. Well now, if you're 30 - 40 - 50 - - at least at any age over 30, brace yourself....

"Perhaps the most serious aspect of the problem of the two worlds, adult and teenage . . .

(and by the way, I ought to inject at this point, it's only a fool who admits that there are not two worlds -- a teenage world is a world all of its own...let that be understood as best we can at this point)

"Perhaps the most serious aspect of the problem of the two worlds, adult and teenage, is that although the teenagers are eager to become adults, they are not at all sure that they are going to like the adult world. From what they see of it, they are not so sure that it's going to be a pleasant place in which to live. Certainly it has material comforts aplenty, but young people find themselves wondering whether the comforts are worth the price. The adult world - -

(and this is what really put me on edge)

- - - does not seem to be very happy, unless the happiness is promoted by several strong scotch-and-waters ('go light on the water!'). It's a hectic, frantic world in which no one has any time to do what they want to do, and in which family relationships deteriorate in the face of the demands of business and social life. It is a world in which there seems to be little left in the way of challenge except making money and becoming a success. And since these don't seem to make their parents happy, teenagers wonder why they should expect to be happy in pursuit of the same goals. We have lavished much on our young people, more than on any age group of adolescence in human history, but there is one thing of which we have deprived them: we have taken purpose out of their lives. There is nothing exciting left to do, no challenges left to meet. They will follow after their parents on the road to success because there is nothing left to do, but they do it with a heavy heart, because they

cannot help but suspect that there ought to be something else. As Paul Goodman puts it: 'They have early resigned. They have lost hope because society has lost its faith in any other goal beyond the pursuit of the material comforts.' The teenage world we have described," says the author, "is not a particularly pretty one."

Now listen to this:

"It is not the world of vandalism and violence of newspaper headlines; it is rather a world of confusion, frustration, and one almost hesitates to use the word -- despair. Can anything be done about it? Of course things can be done about it but they will not be simple or easy. The world of young people, as we have said, is but a cruelly realistic reflection of the world of their parents. If we wish to change teen culture, then we must change the culture of the larger society. We must put some kind of purpose and vision back into our lives"

Now you may not be willing to accept that indictment, if you're over 30, 35, 40 or 50. Suppose you are not willing to accept all that he suggests? But at least for the balance of this sermon, let's say it to ourselves: Here is an element of truth that we cannot afford to ignore. Suppose it were true, as some of us are reluctantly beginning to believe that it is true - - what now can we say to ourselves? Should it be that they are living in a reflection of our mood?

Oh, I've lived long enough to understand that maybe I can excuse myself, or I can excuse you if you're over 40 or 45 - - that you should experience a measure of despair. We have been working rather hard at this business of living. We have put a great deal of effort into it. After at least three decades, we've tried to get somewhere. We just haven't tried to waste our time - - honestly we haven't! And at whatever place we are now, we may objectively say, in the process we have been shoved around a bit. We've known a measure of jostling and pushing. And we know that it's not all apple pie and roses.....and sometimes we wonder if it is worth the effort, and

particularly so when with a measure of charity we look upon ourselves in judgment and say,

"Work hard as we have, we simply haven't done it for ourselves" - - I know full well that I'm preaching to a Christian congregation, that none among us have ever expended his energy selfishly. With a measure of candor and also charity, for the most part what we've done we've done that somebody else might benefit by it.

And then from our vantage-point we have our moments when we look around and discover that we're not always getting a return on the investment that we've made in human nature. And when we have our moments of despondency we wonder whether or not it's been worth it. I can understand why an adult might have his moments of despair, and sadness - - but why youth should suffer despair, why youth should be sad and sour - - - honestly now, I can't quite understand this! Even though I've read what Greeley has said...

...youth has yet to be pushed around the way some
of us have been pushed around....

...youth - - they have yet to make the investment
against which they might despair because
they haven't gotten the return....

...to trace the lines of sadness and despair on those who are young? It could be inexcusable, if it were not that they might be caught up in the reflection of our mood and of our despair.

What also puzzles me is that some time ago a very distinguished lecturer went out to the Middle West and was speaking on a college campus. As is the custom so frequently, there was a glorified bull session after his address. It was attended by some faculty members, but for the most part by students from

that college and from the school across the way. Let me read for you now the account of what happened that night. The words of the speaker are such as these:

"After we had spent about a half-hour talking about the apathy of young people, and the reason for this apathy, one young man who had previously been silent spoke up. Said he, 'I'll tell you why no one cares any more. We all feel that we have lost, that the Communists have already beaten us, that if we do not go down to defeat in a war, then we will be overcome by economic competition. Krushchev is right, we all know deep down that we are going to be buried. We just hope that we can squeeze out a few years of happiness before the end comes. The Communists are the wave of the future, and we've had it. But with some luck, the big blow-up will come after our lives are over.'"

...said the speaker that night on the college campus, who was caught up with this discussion on apathy and had to sit through this young man's remarks, said he, "Try as I might, I could persuade none of the young people in the room that night that the young man was wrong! This is the faith," says he, "that we have passed on to our young people." Small wonder that they should have cause for despair."

Do you honestly think that it's too late to do anything about it? And I'm addressing my remarks to anybody who is over 30, granted now that we're going to assume some measure of responsibility for this condition. Let's do

it -- let's be willing to assume some measure of responsibility for this situation. Do you think it's too late to do anything about it? I for one do not think that it's too late -- granted that we can permit ourselves an adequate philosophy of life. And if you and I can live by a philosophy of life that's adequate, then maybe we can beat this whole business of despair.

The sermon has a text, of course it does, and you ought to hear it right now, I Peter, 4th chapter, 10th verse:

"As every man has received the gift, even so
minister the same to one another as good
stewards of the manifold grace of God."

This is a text, I submit to you, that can justify for us an adequate philosophy of life if we'll simply take it at its face value. I see no reason for a man to have despair if he can personify the meaning of this text. Let's look at it . . .

...if every man recognizes that he begins life with something being given to him: "As every man has received the gift"

...you know, don't you, that every single one of us begins life with a world waiting with outstretched hands to do something for us. Why don't we call it by its rightful name? -- it's a lesson that I'm learning all over again as a grandfather. I remember how the truth was impressed upon me when in the more objective way I could look upon a child, and when young Christopher was less than six weeks old and I saw him in his crib.....there's a certain stage in the infant's life when the child can't possibly do anything for itself except cry. It can't feed itself, it can't dress itself, it can't walk -- it can't even turn itself over without assistance at a certain period in its life....

...you and I, if we're going to have an adequate philosophy of life,

ought to begin at this point, that when we came into this world we came into a world waitingt to receive us! There were outstretched hands waiting to do something for us, just simply to imply that the adequate philosophy of life ought to be the philosophy of a duty - - as long as I live I am in duty bound to pay back that which was first done for me. How different your life and my life could be if we were running our course always trying to thank somebody, always trying to show our gratitude for what's been done for us, even before we came on the horizon.

The happiest person that I know is always the grateful person, to say nothing of the debt that we owe to God himself, the source of all good and the giver of all blessings.....the gift of eternal life in Jesus Christ.

Last night as I sat with the son and the daughter of our latest member to enter the Church Triumphant, immeasurable satisfaction in knowing that what God had already done in Christ for her, that there need be no worry as to the estate of her soul. This is the gift that has come to us! - -

" . . as every man has received the gift . . "

Oh, I must interject something here lest I forget it -- granted the world needs changing, let's assure ourselves that the world just isn't going to be changed by 10:30 tomorrow morning. We're not arguing the fact that the world doesn't need changing. We're simply stressing the truth that it's not about to be changed just like that! Think how long we've been trying to get a cure for cancer, and because we haven't gotten a cure for cancer over-night, is this cause for despair?....

...I for one have been trying to see some fundamental change in the make-up of my own soul, and even at this stage in life I'm still battling the pollution of the evil in my heart from which I can't be completely made free....

So we do well to remember that in our adequate philosophy of life, it may take a bit of doing until the achievement is actually accomplished. And because we might never succeed on this side of Heaven, that's why God gives us the promise of eternal life, so that He will complete for us what we are unable of completing here.

And then I must also suggest in this adequate philosophy of life:

"As every man has received the gift, even
so minister the same to one another - -"

....and what is that except to say, you begin where you are with what you have, and you dole it out to the person nearest at hand. I am reasonably certain that God doesn't expect me to change the whole world. It's absolutely impossible. But I think God does hold us responsible to do what we can to help improve our own lives and those with whom we have association.

Now don't misunderstand me, I most certainly would sit in judgment on any man who turns the television dial, and sits there with insensitivity to the inhumanity of the ghetto, or the slums, or the brutal murderous warfare in Southeast Asia, and who doesn't allow himself to have a measure of concern for what's happening somewhere else. But at the same time, how much greater should be the judgment upon that person if becoming sensitive to those things, he remains insensitive to the wife who shares his life, and to the children within his own family circle....

"As every man has received the gift, let
him minister one to another."

God does intend for us to go to work with what we have with those nearest at hand.

Do you know how that wonderful organization or fellowship of the Little Brothers of the Poor got started in the Roman Catholic Church? -- hear me out at this point! One chap, whose name I've forgotten, discovered that there

were two people whom he knew who went every day without a complete meal. What did he do? He took it upon himself to see that those two people had a hot meal. There were other people who were impressed with what he was doing and they wanted to cut in, and they said, "Let us help you." Wise man that he was, he said, "No - - you go and do your own thing -- you go and find your own two people, and you minister to them." Small wonder, then that in this day and age the Little Brothers of the Poor are scattered all over the world, magnified many times.

Is it too much to believe that that's the way God's goodness is to be shared in this world . . . ? Let's not be thrown by the complexities of modern-day living. Let's go on believing that the simple, direct approach can work. Let's try it just for five days, maybe a week. Each one of us, where he is, with what he has, putting himself to another's good. Those who've tried it in God's name and with God's help (this is important!) say it works . . .

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"A MAN NAMED PETER"

Through Jesus Christ, Thy Son,
our Lord. Amen.

Today's sermon is the first in a series to be preached on Sunday mornings during Lent. Allow me to tell you at once the purpose intended to be served by this series. Just as you can put your finger on a certain spot on a map and say, "Here's where it took place," or just as you might be able to travel across the waters and one day find yourself in the Holy Land and visit the city of Jerusalem and say to yourself, "Here is where it happened" - - so we are going to take a look at certain people who were caught up in that tremendous drama of redemption, personalities who figured in the sacrificial life and death of Jesus Christ, particularly as they loomed upon the horizon in that final week.

Today, it's a man named Peter, and the text is for this sermon the 29th, the 31st verses of the 14th chapter of the Gospel according to Mark:

"But Peter said to him, 'Even though they all
fall away, I will not.' And Jesus said to
him, 'Truly, I say to you, this very night,
before the cock crows twice, you will deny
me three times.' But Peter said vehemently,
'If I must die with you, I will not deny you.'
So said they all."

The text tells us a great deal about Simon Peter. It tells even more about Jesus Christ. You'll keep remembering that sentence, won't you, as this sermon continues to unfold? - - the text tells a great deal about Simon Peter - - it tells even more about Jesus Christ.

Well, let's get with it at once.

First, the man named Peter. Who was he? What do you know about him? We do well to remember that when that Carpenter's Son decided He was meant to be a preacher and turned his back upon Nazareth, putting down on the carpenter's bench for the last time the hammer, the saw and the adze, then to go out into the world and to move, in itinerant fashion, from one community to another, He went preaching and teaching....

...but all the time He was preaching and teaching, mark you, I'm inclined to think that He had His eyes upon the congregation -- looking them over very carefully, hoping that in this instance or in that instance His eye might fall upon one person in particular who might be a likely candidate for recruitment.

We have reason to believe that Jesus Christ fully understood that the Kingdom was not simply to come because He proclaimed it. He'd never be able to touch everybody. He could initiate, He could outline it, and by the power of the Holy Spirit He could see other people introduced to it. But He fully recognized that He had limited tenure on this earth, and that one day He would be going to Heaven, His earthly pilgrimage completed, but the Kingdom would still have to spread! So very naturally He looked for recruits, those upon whom He could depend.

You know very well He chose twelve of them. Among the first to be chosen was a man named Peter. I can also tell you this about him: that among the twelve, this man Peter was also fortunate enough to be included in the inner circle.

Now you may ask me, does that mean that Jesus Christ showed partiality? Of course. not. The Scriptures say: "And he took with him Peter, James and

John" - - every now and then just this limited number of men. What can we make of that?

...can we not say to ourselves that there are those who respond to leadership as other people may not respond? Can we believe that certain people have a measure of kinship of the spirit with one other person in particular, as others may not have? From our human perspective, maybe we might settle for that. As you and I might readily understand, that if 21 of you were to take a tour tomorrow -- suppose you had banded together and you were going to be gone 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 weeks ...those of us who have already been part of that kind of experience know very well that by the time the tour would be completed you'd level off and you'd gravitate toward certain people as you might not gravitate toward other people!....and you'd find a certain relationship or a bond with this person and that person that you would not experience with others....

...well maybe even from a human perspective, you might see how Peter, James and John were part of that inner circle. The man of whom we speak -- don't forget it -- was one of the inner circle.

What else can I tell you about him?

Well, I can tell you that he's the most spoken-of all the disciples. I think you could establish the case quite clearly that no disciple receives more coverage in the New Testament than does Peter. And you might be drawn to him for this reason -- you happen to know more about him. I think of all the disciples he is your favorite, as he is my favorite, because there's so much of pure honest human nature reflected in Peter.

...Peter, as an example, was the man who usually was first to speak up

...Peter was the man who made the bold statements
...not entirely irreverently, one can say he was big-mouthed -- never lacking for words, and always making the grand statement, always seemingly motivated by noble intentions: "No matter what other people do, Jesus, you can count on me" - - that's the kind of talk he gave Jesus.

Now there's something else that you ought to know about him. Maybe you've never paid too much attention to it. Do you by any chance remember part of what is presumed to be the first real conversation that took place between Jesus and Peter? Not long after they met...Simon was introduced by his brother Andrew, and then Jesus initiates the conversation in this manner -- He says, "Your name is Simon - the son of Jonah. . . "

(now, allow me a measure of freedom at this point --

Jesus spoke to Simon in much this way...)

"Let me tell you something, Simon, your name is going to be changed. And I'll tell you why your name is going to be changed: because there's going to be tremendous change in your character! You stick with me long enough, and while your name now indicates a dove, you'll end up with a name that means a rock! I'm going to firm you up, man!"

...to all intents and purposes, that was the
gist of the conversation.

Now the text for this sermon deals with one of the last conversations that Jesus ever had with Peter, before the crucifixion. On the night in which He was betrayed -- get it now -- against that first conversation, this is what takes

place now, as one of the last conversations:

"Simon Peter, before the night's over, you're going
to deny me."

Well there you have it. That's Simon Peter for you -- a man in whom our Blessed Lord had so much confidence, a man who made so many bold and extravagant statements. No wonder we're drawn to him. So much of our nature is reflected as we stand in front of him. He had a halo, alright, but like as not it was dropping from his head into the dust, and Simon Peter would reach for it and try to straighten it out, and never get it quite perfect and put it back...and always a bit tilted. His feet? -- 100% crumbly clay! No wonder we're drawn to him! That's the kind of man Peter was.

The text -- let the opening sentence for the sermon bob back again on the horizon. The text tells us quite a bit about Simon Peter...but it tells even more about Jesus Christ. Get it now in proper perspective: Simon Peter was Jesus' man -- He had chosen him. He'd made an investment in him. Now comes the wind-up and Jesus Christ says to Simon Peter, "You are going to fail me. You're going to deny me."

I suppose if Jesus were to be judged by today's standard of applied psychology, he'd flunk the course, because certainly you don't talk to anybody like that! And given such a negative feeling when you'd like to see a man register to the full. But Jesus Christ always told it exactly as He saw it. But Jesus Christ is not a human being. Any one of us might have said to Simon Peter, "Simon, I've had you around now for three years. By this time you ought to be able to produce -- you ought to measure up! And because I know very well that you're not going to measure up, you might as

well go now! Don't let me suffer the grim reality of your failure. Don't let me have to say to myself that my investment did not pay off." That's the way you and I might have spoken to Simon Peter.

But not so Jesus Christ. When our Blessed Lord said to him, "You're going to deny me" - our Blessed Lord was also indicating (if we could only have seen the look on His face) -- "Even though I know this about you, Simon Peter, I'm not going to wash my hands of you. Even though you may deny me, you are still my man. I will still claim you."

Now let it be clearly understood by all of us, that when you and I see something of ourselves in Simon Peter, we ought to permit ourselves to believe that God looks upon us in the same way as He looked upon Simon Peter. And God is saying to us, "I'm not going to wash my hands of you. I am still going to believe in you - - I'm still going to bank/^{on}you - - I will stay by your side until you come through!"

I'm not always sure how many people there are who appreciate the sermons that I preach, but I know one thing: the only type person who can appreciate this sermon today is the person who has fallen from grace, who knows that he has disappointed his Lord, and who knows that he's been re-established, not by his merit, but because of the unfailing love and trust of Jesus Christ. Peter, with feet of clay and tilted halo, disappointed and denied his Blessed Lord. But the God who is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ never completely has done with us. Peter might deny Christ, but Christ will not deny Peter.

You'll be tempted to smile broadly when I read this illustration for you, but I warn you, it has a kernel of truth that needs respect. When Ulysses S. Grant, the Civil War general who went on to become President, when he was 8

years old he wanted to buy a pony. The advertised price for the pony was \$25.00. Finally he went to the owner, and this is the conversation that took place between 8-year old Ulysses S. Grant, in all childhood innocence, this is the conversation that took place with the owner: "Papa says I may offer you \$20.00 for the colt....but if you won't take that, then I'm to offer you \$22.50....and if you won't take that, then I'm to give you \$25.00."

Now the boy Grant was far wiser than we think. He wanted something very, very much, and at the very outset he made up his mind that he'd prepare himself to pay the full price.

Is it too much now to ask you to shift gears? God wants us very, very much. God makes up His mind that He's going to be willing to pay the full price for us, if we are to be His, and His completely. So Jesus Christ made up His mind in relationship to Peter - - He'd pay the full price for him. He wouldn't give up. He'd go all the way. That's why in the post-Resurrection appearance of Jesus, one of the very first men whom He names, if not the first man, is Peter.

You don't get a saint overnight. They just don't drop down from Heaven fully fashioned. It takes a bit of doing to grow a saint! In some cases it takes a lifetime.....and all you need is patience, and trust. God says, hold up Peter as an example: it pays off. And this is the ground for your hope, and for mine.

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"A MAN NAMED JUDAS"

Through Jesus Christ, Thy Son,
our Lord. Amen.

With apologies to the Broadway producer, 'A strange thing happened to me on my way to the pulpit at Saint Luke this morning' - - - I just couldn't quite put my mind on today's sermon. For as I came to the pulpit I was thinking of something that took place last Wednesday night.

The initial lecture on the study on the "Privilege and Power of Prayer" had been made. And then the person who had been invited to be the responder, and to encourage reaction, had gone to the podium. And as the conversation went on, she and I agreed upon reflection that the people in the room had gotten hung up at a certain point, and we weren't quite sure what was to be made of it.

Now the gist of the first lecture was that Jesus Christ is never fully understood until He is seen as the Man of Prayer. That all that He was able to do He was able to do because He was constantly being replenished and renewed by God's Spirit, through the prayer experience. In the conversation that followed, somebody raised the question about the fact that Jesus Christ had come to fulfill a specific mission, and He could not have failed in the fulfillment of that mission - - He was born to succeed. From the very beginning it was ordained that way, that He would not fail.

Now that kind of thinking can trigger all kinds of thoughts, particularly now when you come to today's sermon, which is another in the series dealing with the personalities caught up in the final week of our Blessed Lord...His arrest, the denial, the betrayal, the crucifixion. Today's sermon bears the

title, "A Man Named Judas," and the text for the sermon is the second verse of the 18th chapter of the Gospel according to John:

"And Judas, who also betrayed him . . . "

Now if one could establish that Jesus could not fail, is it logical to say, then, that Judas could not succeed? For as he is referred to in the Scriptures, constantly the reference is made 'And Judas who also betrayed him.'

What shall we make of it?

Well, let me put your mind at ease if I can. Whatever else you may think or say, the fact is the fact -- Jesus did succeed.....Judas failed. For our purpose this morning in this sermon, let's ask the question: Why did Judas betray? Why? Are you waiting for an answer from me? Well this is my answer: I really don't know why, specifically that is, Judas betrayed our Master. It isn't enough to say that he was diabolically possessed.....it isn't enough to say that Satan entered into him. We may have to settle for that. But because we are human, we keep pressing the question: Why, Judas, why?

Maybe we won't get a specific answer, because maybe Judas did not know the answer to that question himself....just as you may take a youngster who has misbehaved, and as one in authority, as his parent, or somebody else, you sit the youngster down in front of you and then you say to him, "Why did you do it?"and the poor kid in front of us may wiggle and squirm nervously, embarrassed and chagrined, and perchance remorseful....may in all honesty say, "I don't know exactly why I did it."

...oh, sometimes they may throw the answer to us that I'm not so sure that I trust too well: "Something made me do it." ...but by and large the youngster will settle, as he sits there, hoping that we might accept at face value, "I don't know why -- I only did it."

Would you believe me that that could be the case with Judas? I'm not sure, but it could be. But you and I still ask the question: Why, Judas?

Now let me give you the benefit of other people's thinking. As I have wrestled with this character through the years I've come to the conclusion it might be one reason, it might be a number of different reasons -- it might be all of them put together. But let's get with it.

Number One: There's a school of thought that says Judas betrayed Jesus Christ because he was envious.....

...look at it this way -- as we said in last Sunday's sermon, on occasion Jesus Christ would look around and his eye would fall upon Peter and James and John and He'd say to them: "Come along with me." -- they were the three who constituted an inner circle, and never once have we any reason to believe that Jesus Christ looked and said, "Today, Judas, it's your turn -- Judas, you come along with me. I want to spend a little time just with you and you alone" . . . as we understand it, that never happened to Judas....

...Judas might have reasoned with himself and would have said, "If only once Jesus would say to me, 'Judas, I need your support, I'd welcome your advice. You know things didn't go too well in that last preaching mission that we had. I'm trying to figure it out --

what do you think was wrong, Judas? Tell it to me as you saw it . . . "

...who knows but what Judas may have reasoned that way to himself on more than one occasion, and it never happened. Never once did Jesus say, "Judas, come along with me tonight. Let's just spend a little time together. . . "

...or Judas may have reasoned to himself in this way, "If only once He would have made me chairman of a committee! If only once He would have given me a

chance to stand up and tell it as I understood it...but big-mouth Peter -- he even makes the inner circle!"

...well, there's a school of thought that says this is one reason maybe why Judas betrayed: he was envious. And envy is a terrible sin. And that might have been the sin of Judas.

Some pastors tell me that that vexes and irritates them with people in their congregation, because there are some people in a congregation who never get on a committee, who never get a chance to make a speech, and if they could become envious, theirs might be the kind of sin that so easily besets. I don't write it off lightly, my friend, that might have been the sin of Judas.

There are those who tell us that Judas was avaricious, rather greedy. He had the money bag, and he was obsessed with the notion that they never had quite enough money to go around. Look at it this way: Jesus was an idealist, a dreamer. Chances are that when He died the only thing He owned was the clothing on His back, and we have no reason to believe that He did a day's work from the time that He left the carpenter's shop. Which means that we might be able to say that every meal that He ate for three years He ate at somebody else's table. Being a little bit of a group, they had to have some kind of funds, and maybe Judas was the one who always had to worry that there never was going to be quite enough to get around. So that maybe one day when there was dangled in front of him 30 pieces of silver, it seemed rather attractive...

...well, that might have been the sin of Judas. It is the sin of some people, to become obsessed with the fact that they're never going to have enough.

Some tell us that Judas was a chap who always considered himself an out-

sider. Look at it this way: he was the only one of the twelve who came from a part of Palestine all by himself. The other eleven came from Galilee, and from the very beginning he thought of himself as an outsider -- not simply an outsider to the inner circle, Peter, James and John, but an outsider to all of them. It might be that he could be classified as a peripheral disciple. Would you believe me that when your Pastor gets on his knees, and lifts up the people in this parish in the arms of his petitions, that as burdensome as anything that rests upon his heart -- those who are on the periphery, those who are allowing themselves to become alienated from the ongoing program life and spirit of this vital congregation.....because I know what happens to people on the periphery -- they alienate themselves. And in times of alienation all kinds of evil things can go through a man's mind. Maybe this was the sin of Judas -- he was an outsider.

Now get ready for this one: there are some people who say that Judas was a good man, and a true believer in Jesus Christ. He never doubted his Messiahship, and he wanted fervently to see the Kingdom of God established here on earth. But the sin of Judas in this regard was the sin of impatience -- the Kingdom just wasn't coming fast enough. For three years now Jesus had talked about the Kingdom -- they'd done quite a bit to get it established. But now even enthusiasm in Jesus Christ was beginning to wane....He wasn't nearly as popular now as He was two years ago, and Judas knew it. And Judas was caught up with a great measure of enthusiasm that Jesus Christ was the Promised One. So Judas, becoming very impatient, and ambitious for the things of God, became victimized by the sin of ambition and impatience that led him to force the hand of Jesus Christ -- so he thought.....

....there are those who say he reasoned within himself, "If

I can just get Jesus Christ in a predicament, where He'll have to establish His Messiahship, where the legions of God will come and sustain Him - - then the Kingdom will be here! . . . "

...Judas was impatient with the dilly-dallying.

There is such a sin, you know -- the sin of impatience, which is also coupled with the sin of wanting something done my way. Judas was so obsessed with the notion that that's the way the Kingdom had to be established that he closed his mind to any other way by which God would operate. That's quite a sin, my friend, to limit God to only one way of operating, and it's the way you have figured it out.

Well God doesn't always jump when we call the numbers. And God may see fit to take a little bit longer to work something out, no matter how earnestly we may desire it by tomorrow morning at 10:00 o'clock. Well, you pay your money if you want to, you take your choice - - these might have been the sins, any one of them, all of them put together -- you might even think of others. The fact remains that he betrayed Him.

Yet the mark of divinity somehow remains. Once he had betrayed Jesus Christ, Judas became disgusted with himself and what he had done. He simply could not stem the remorseful tide that overwhelmed him. So, fully aware of his heinous deed, he sought out the people who had placed in his hands the filthy thirty pieces of silver. What a pity! Now they couldn't care less. Poor Judas. He had turned against his best friend, and now he was left alone...all....all.... alone.

...well, it need not have been that way. He could have been remembered

today as Saint Judas. The potential was there. He had been chosen by Jesus Christ.

Let me conclude with a very simple story, more legend, undoubtedly, than fact, yet there is inherent truth in it. It's been said that an artist decided that he'd like to put on canvas the faces of the twelve disciples. He would take his time until the thing was done. He also decided he would begin first with the face of any man who might portray all the wonderful spiritual sensitivity features of the disciple nearest to Jesus Christ....so he went looking for any man who might look like John the beloved disciple.

He found the man and painted his face. Then he went through Andrew.... Matthew...Bartholomew, and all the rest of them, saving until last the face of Judas Iscariot who betrayed Him.

How long it took until he found that character I can't tell you. Surely it was a passing of years. And then one day he found the subject that he thought resembled the characteristics of a Judas. As he painted the man's face he couldn't quite have done with the man's eyes - - "I've seen them before." He had seen the eyes before....for the man who now poses as Judas Iscariot is the same man who years earlier had posed as John the beloved disciple.....which is simply to say that the potential for good and the potential for evil lies within us.

This is not a sermon designed to deal only with the evil personified in Judas Iscariot. It's a sermon that's meant to come down hard on the wonderful truth that while Judas betrayed, the love of the Master remained constant. Even on the very night in which He was betrayed, Jesus referred to Judas as "friend." The truth of the Gospel is this: God never has completely done with us, and maybe it was the recognition of that marvelous truth that pre-

sumably causes Judas to cry out in torment, in the place of the damned, for he had turned against something as wonderful as that!

...did he ever know it beforehand?

Well, some say Hell is the truth found
out too late. But a man doesn't have to go to Hell.

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"A MAN NAMED ANNAS"

O GOD, we have so little time to do the sort of thing we want to do right now, to shut away from our presence here the pressures and the forces of an outside world, that perhaps the time that we spend now we may better understand that world and see it from your perspective. To that end, confront us now with divine truth. Through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

There are, as you well know, all kinds of preachers. For our purpose this morning, let's divide them into two categories, those who use gimmicks and those who do not use gimmicks. If it's the responsibility of a preacher to proclaim truth and to see that it's communicated, then in all likelihood he ought not to hesitate to use whatever he may see fit in order to get the message across.

Some prefer to stand with dignity behind the sacred desk and grace the pulpit as best they can, with candor and dignity. Others perhaps can wax informal and in that way draw upon this technique or that technique to make an impact...

...there was a preacher, you know, who on Easter Day did not process with the choir. Once the congregation had assembled and the choir was in its place, they looked around for the preacher and there was no preacher to be seen. The congregation was somewhat startled by a voice that they did recognize as his voice. But the voice came through a person walking down the center aisle of the nave. He was

not clad in vestments....he was dressed in the garb of a Roman soldier. As he walked down the aisle he kept saying,

"I was there!.....I was there!.....I was there!....."

...and in that way he preached his sermon, trying to portray for the assembled people what it must have been like to have been there when Jesus Christ was crucified. Then, of course, he swept very broadly into the theme of the Resurrection and delivered an Easter sermon the like of which, I am certain, that congregation had not heard before and would not soon forget.

Speaking of gimmicks, then there was that preacher who felt charged

with the responsibility to lay before all of his people the fact that every single one of them was involved in the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. So he announced that if they'd come next Sunday to church, he'd introduce them to one person in particular who was caught up in the crucifixion of Jesus Christ...

....well, when they came to church, he directed them to the parish hall, and there very cleverly he had designed at one end of the parish hall a small booth, about the size of a telephone booth.

....the congregation being a small one -- he said, now these are the instructions: one at a time you open that door and you step inside, and as you open the door you will see for yourself the person most responsible for the death of Jesus Christ. You can imagine how shook-up they were when one by one they opened the doorthe only thing that they saw as they opened the door was a full-length mirror, by reflection their own image.....

This series of sermons being preached in Saint Luke Church this Lenten-tide is without the use of gimmicks, but an honest attempt is being made to put before each one of us a better understanding of the people who were involved, and inescapably so, in the arrest, denial, the betrayal and the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. As we turn to the Good Book we pick out this character and that character -- we talk about them. Thus far we've concentrated on Peter, who denied.....last Sunday on Judas, who betrayed. Today it's about a man named Annas.

Let me tell you some things about him, and all that I'm about to tell you will center around one truth: he was a rascal. He was not simply a rascal. He was an old man who was a rascal. He was not simply a rascal and an old man who was a rascal, but he was also the worst kind of a rascal. Now the text, the 13th verse of the 18th chapter of the Gospel according to John:

"Then the band of soldiers and their captain
and the officers of the Jews took Jesus and bound
him...and led him away to Annas first . . ."

Really now, to Annas first? Why?

He had no official status whatsoever. But Annas is a representative of those who having no official status, still are people who know how to wield terrific power. They operate behind the scenes. They **pull** the strings. They are far more effective behind the scenes than on the stage. Let it be said again: Annas had no official status whatsoever. But the people in that day who had laid hold upon Jesus Christ had gotten the word, and a free and almost reckless translation of that word could be: "Clear it with Annas first -- take him to Annas." And they did. And then from Annas they took Him to somebody

else. But the first contact was made with Annas.

Now, let's have a little clearer focus on this man Annas.

He was almost 70 years of age, more than twice the age of Jesus Christ, who was brought to him. Annas had been High Priest for seven years, from A.D. 7 to A.D. 14. Then when the Romans came in, threw their weight around, for reasons that seemed right to them, they got rid of Annas, and deposed him from his High Priesthood.

But now keep in mind, we're dealing with a rascal, and a rascal never gives up easily. Being a rascal, he was a conniver, and he arranged for all five sons that he had to eventually become High Priest in his stead....and when he ran out of sons, he saw that his daughter was married to a man who one day might be considered High Priest, and so he was -- Caiaphas. Well that's the kind of a rascal he was, a conniver.

Mention was made of the fact that he was an old rascal. He was a young rascal who grew up to be an old rascal, and that's a terrible thought. Because if time is anything, it ought to be an opportunity for improvement, and not the worsening of one's character. Some of you know full well now that I cherish, as I stand before you, to speak the word that you need most to hear on a Sunday morning -- the words of God's forgiveness. And that's part of the responsibility of the pastor who stands before you, to be God's representative in an awesome moment.....just as we did this morning, we came together and we told God in all honesty that we wanted to be forgiven. And we need to have the assurance that we are forgiven. So in this magnificent liturgy of the Lutheran Church there is that great moment when the voice of God's representative is heard authoritatively, not as the voice of a man, but as one who is a man who represents God, and awesomely -- the

answer to your heart's plea....

- we have two options in the Service Book that you have in your hands. And now you understand what my preference is

"The Almighty and merciful God grant unto you, being penitent, pardon and remission of all your sins, time . . for amendment of life, and the grace and comfort of his Holy Spirit."

...it's those words "time for amendment of life" that keep ringing in my heart. For I who some time ago early learned that in the past decade that I have lived longer than I have yet to live, have reached the point where I prize the precious gift of each new day -- it's God's new gift -- time is God's precious gift to all of us, by which He gives us another chance to become better....to improve.....

....in the case of Annas, he exploited the gift of time, and he looked upon each day as a chance to become more adept at becoming a rascal, and a conniver. And at 70 years of age he was nothing but an old rascal.

I said three things to you about his being a rascal.

One, that he was a rascal.

Second, that he was an old rascal.

And third, that he was the worst kind of rascal because he happened to have been a religious rascal. And there's none worse than that. He had spent all of his time and his energy within the established church, if not as a High Priest, then as one closely associated with the Sanhedrin and those who were High Priests.

Now let me explain to you how he expressed himself as a rascal through

his religion. The devout Jew was given to understand that when he came to the temple, he would offer a sacrifice. According to their religion, it was the sacrifice of an animal, and very properly so, according to their religion, it had to be an animal without blemish...

...and let me say quite parenthetically and quickly, there's nothing wrong with that...it becomes a measure of devotion to our Lord Jesus Christ that we would want to offer to Him our best -- not our left-overs -- not the tainted -- not anything without value. Some of us have never really caught up with the Old Testament. We go on still to this very day giving God the left-overs, the things that have no value to us, the tainted....

But the devout Jew when he went to the temple to offer the sacrifice would bring the best that he had without blemish.

Now listen carefully: that rascal Annas, he still had his finger in the pie. And so he, in the company of some other people, said, "Let's see that we get the responsibility to appoint the inspectors that look over the animals that are brought up to be sacrificed." And you can well imagine what kind of inspectors Annas and his company would appoint. They knew the one that had appointed them and they knew the one they had to serve...and they knew why they had been appointed. So again and ever so often they'd reject an animal. Then what would they do? They'd say, "Come on in. Here within the courtyard of the temple -- over there we'll accommodate you! You want to make your sacrifice - - - your animal is no good - - - we have some # A-1 animals. We'll help you out!"

You can imagine what this meant to the devout Jew. He could still make his sacrifice, so he goes over to get his animal without blemish. What he had thought was without blemish they had rejected. You're right! -- when he goes to buy his animal in the temple marketplace, the courtyard, they soak him, they charge an exorbitant fee, and he has no out.

Annas and Caiaphas and their kind benefit by this exploitation. It stank to high heaven, and that's why to this very day you can read on the page of Scripture that it so infuriated the gentle Jesus, meek and mild, that one day when he went to the temple, He grabbed for a whip, turned over the tables of the money-changers, and literally, physically drove them from the temple! That's how the kind of thing that Annas was doing infuriated Jesus Christ. And it's before this kind of man now that Jesus Christ is first taken. Annas, the rascal....old rascal.....a religious rascal.

Now bear this in mind, my friend. The word had gotten out -- "Clear it first with Annas." Annas had it within the power, so it would seem to us, to chart the future course of Jesus Christ. Is it reading too much into the story of the life of Annas that he might have stopped what later most certainly developed? Well, I don't know what you may make of that, but I do know that every now and then you and I become the person who is the first one making contact between Jesus Christ and somebody else. friend or foe, and to a large degree what may happen after we've passed Jesus Christ off may determine His ultimate fate in the minds and hearts of other people.

....it's as awesome as all that.....it's as frightening as all that....

* * * * *

"A MAN NAMED HEROD"

It's Your Voice, O God, that we need
to hear most. Help us to listen.
And once we hear, enable us to obey.
Through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, Our
Lord. Amen.

Had you listened carefully that day, it's not too much to presume that you might have heard conversation something like this: "Why, I'd eat my hat, if that doesn't look exactly like Sam Schechendrach....or that fellow over there, the third one from the left -- doesn't he look like Adolph Achenbach! ...or the other one, next to him -- he has the eyes, the nose and the lips exactly of Karl Klingensnift!

...well, it's not too much to presume that that's the kind of conversation you might have heard, had you been in Gettysburg the day they dedicated in the old chapel the life-size painting of the Master and the Twelve.

Now maybe I'd better fill you in a little bit. One-time member of this congregation, the beloved Herbert C. Alleman, was professor of Old Testament at the Seminary. He had been once the pastor of Messiah Church in Philadelphia, and there as a pastor he had encouraged and cultivated the friendship of a very wealthy man who on occasion channeled gifts into the church through Dr. Alleman. As I understand it, he made possible the life-size painting of the Master and the Twelve, to be placed in the old chapel at Gettysburg Seminary.

It seated perhaps only about a hundred people. The front of the chapel

was rotunda-fashion, and as you sat there you saw, of course, the organ and a space for a quartet up above the altar....but there behind the altar and around the front of the chancel area, this huge canvas, again life-size of the Master and the Twelve.

Now it so happens that the man who was commissioned to do that painting decided not to make it an exact duplication of the Da Vinci masterpiece. For he said to himself, I'll take as my models the Pennsylvania Germans who live in the York and the Hanover area. That's why, had you been ~~there~~ the day of the dedication, you might have heard snatches of conversation like that.

Now may I suggest that if there were a place here in Saint Luke -- and for the life of me I don't know where it would be - - - but if there were a place for a life-size painting of the Master and the Twelve, and someone commissioned an artist to come on location and to choose from among you those whose features and characteristics might resemble the Master's twelve, and you would look at it.....would you recognize among the twelve the features of a disciple in a face that might resemble Harry Crow's.....Fred Soencksen'sPhil Nixon's....Ray Reed's.....? The question can be put that way, because the Master is constantly choosing His men, and He finds them wherever He can.

When the decision ~~was~~ made to remove the central panels in our altar and to replace those panels with a wood carving of the Last Supper, we were given to understand that whenever we would approach the altar to receive the Sacrament, we might look upon ourselves as we were gathered there as the extension of that table - - that within our congregation would be found a Peter, a James, a John, a Thomas, an Andrew.

Now why do I tell you all of this? Why do I take four-and-a-half minutes to talk to you in this manner right now? For the simple reason that I must remind you that this series of sermons being preached this Lenten-tide in Saint Luke Church on the characters who were involved in the final week of our Lord, is being preached for only one reason - - that we might recognize that in this our day, the sins and the sinners of that day are also to be found....the Peter, the James, the Andrew, the Judas -- Pilate...Herod...Annas,...Caiaphas.....they walk our streets, they work where you work, and some of them, perchance, worship where you worship.

So Sunday by Sunday we have been talking about those people, and maybe getting some reflection of ourselves as we've meditated upon them. Today, now, in this series, a man named Herod. And the text, the 7th verse of the 23rd chapter of the Gospel according to Luke:

"And then they brought him unto Herod."

Alright, what kind of a man was Herod? Let me identify him for you as best I can by simply saying, he was his father's son. Now whenever you talk like that you tell more about the father than the son, of course. Well, what was his father like? His father was the king at the time of the birth of Jesus Christ, referred to also as "wicked King Herod"....a name that also belongs to his son...

...Herod-the-Great, king at the time of the birth
of Jesus, is the one who lied to the wise men
...he's the one who also issued the decree that the
innocents -- all children under two years of age --
would be massacred

...he's the one who murdered his own wife and
murdered his three sons.....

Herod, the one we're considering now, was every inch his father's son. What can I tell you about him, having said this already?

Well, he was lustful. He was sensuous. He was also religious. He was a Jew. He was Tetrarch of Galilee. If you would have put to him the question: Are you a religious man? - he would have answered, "Of course I am!" Now you won't forget this, will you, as this sermon continues to unfold?

Now just the facts, please, just the facts. This chapter in his life:
...he had a lustful eye for his brother's wife, but he was already married. So he connives and he ships her back to Arabia, where she came from. Then he marries the wife of Philip, his brother -- her name was Herodias. She was every bit his match. Having done this, he antagonized the Arabs, and equally infuriated the Jews. He was fully aware of this, but he did it just the same. His lust had to be satisfied....

Yet he feels uncomfortable about it, and being a religious man, he hopes and prays that perhaps he can get some kind of a blessing. It is not too much to read this into the story. So he gets God's-man-of-that-day, John the Baptist, to come into his court, hoping of course that John the Baptist might say, "Well, you're king, and even God himself makes allowances for kings, and you can get away with something that God would never allow somebody else to get away with - - after all, a king ought to be given some kind of preferential consideration!".....this is the way Herod hoped John the Baptist might speak.

But John the Baptist was never less than God's man. And as God's man

he looks Herod straight in the eye and he says, "You really can't have her! You've done the wrong thing! She doesn't belong to you!"

...Herod never quite forgot this. Nor did Herodias.

Now let me give you some more facts in the case, if you please.

It's a great night in the palace. Herod's having a party. It's really a humdinger.....especially chosen guests, Herod's kind. The banquet table is spread, and they eat and they eat and they eat.....and they drink and they drink and they drink. And then Herod brings out his #1 entertainer, a topless belly-dancer, who happens to be every inch her mother's daughter -- Salome by name, the daughter of Herodias. Being the kind of woman that she is, she easily recognizes lust in the eyes of a man, and she goes to town, she does her thing.

Eventually she gets over to where Herod is. Half-naked, she throws herself upon his body, sits on his knee, fondles him a bit. With her hands and her arms she entwines his neck and his shoulder, and coos in his ear. That does it. And Herod says to her, "Name it -- anything you ask, you can have!" She's every inch her mother's daughter. So she goes off to Herodias and she says, "What shall I ask for?" Herodias has not quite forgotten what John the Baptist did to her. So she instructs her daughter: "Ask for the head of John the Baptist, who is imprisoned down below the palace -- ask for his head on a platter." And that's exactly what she did, and that's exactly what she got!

....now this is the kind of person before whom Jesus Christ is brought in that week of trial -- a scoundrel, a libertine, a murderer, and a chap who breeds himself on all that's sensual.....

Oh, I must remind you that when Jesus heard what had happened to John the Baptist, He was so crushed that He went away and got away from people, just for a little while. Because Jesus Christ had said of John the Baptist, "Of men born of women, none was greater than he" - - that's how highly he thought of the man whose life was sacrificed by a sensuous king who was made weak by a belly-dancer.....

...As Jesus Christ stands in front of Herod now, He was shunted to Herod in this criss-cross of the going place between Pilate and Herod in that last week - - Herod tries to put Him through all the paces, and all the while Jesus Christ stands there without saying a word.....

What - - - the silent Jesus? It's so unlike Him. He was always using words, trying to win people! He even had such good words for such bad people as Judas, and Mary Magdalen, and the thief dying upon a cross. But for Herod.....no words to waste.

What was his undoing? May I suggest a thing or two for you. Now remember what I told you a while ago, that Herod was classified as a religious man. Some time ago I read it and I rejected it when I read it, but I no longer reject it - - it was soundly put, and cleverly so, that bad religion is worse than no religion at all! And Herod practiced his religion badly. What do I mean by that? Pretending to be religious, he allowed himself certain liberties that were absolutely incompatible with religion.

For one thing, when Jesus Christ appeared before him, he refused to take Jesus Christ seriously. He'd go to Jesus and all he wanted was Jesus to perform some kind of a sign, a miracle, to entertain him and his people. The tragic thing in many people's lives who claim to be religious is that

they refuse to take Jesus Christ seriously. Let that be a warning to all of us.

And the second thing that needs to be said and never forgotten is pre-suming to be religious, he allowed himself to remain a sensuous person. He never denied his lust to be fed. He thought he could get away with it. And I suggest to you this morning that sensuality is absolutely incompatible with true spiritual sensitivity. I am talking now about the sensuous person who exploits sex, who violates personality, who uses a person as a thing, for his own selfish gratification. And that's exactly what Herod the king was doing.

....that's why those of us who are religious have to be very careful about some of the books that we think we can read....

...about some of the plays that we think we can see....

And so Jesus stands in front of Herod.

Jesus never so much as speaks a word, for the simple reason that Herod had become stone-deaf to God. You may not like to admit it, my friend, but it can happen. But it doesn't need to happen.

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"A MAN NAMED PILATE"

We wait now, O God, hoping that some
element of truth from the sacred page
perhaps may find a place in our heart
even now. Through Jesus Christ, Thy
Son, our Lord. Amen.

Whether I should tell you or not, I'm not quite certain. At any rate, here's the admission...occasionally when I have the time and the energy, I've watched Perry Mason. I've always been fascinated by court-room procedures, because quite frequently I say to myself -- if I were a lawyer and had to defend this man, could I do it in good conscience?....if I sat in the judge's seat, what would be the thing I would consider as related to whether or not he would be declared guilty or innocent?....if I were a member of the jury, what might go through my mind? -- how seriously would I take my responsibility?

...incidentally, three members of our congregation are just completing a tour of jury duty. As their pastor I wrote them a letter, letting them know that I was remembering them in my prayers as they discharged this civic obligation. Tedious as the task may be, and boring at times, yet it's something that had to be done. One of the group said to me how spent she became by the time the day was over, because she was so sensitive to what she was being exposed to - - - this great responsibility to have to make some decision concerning the fate of another human being.

This morning we come now to the last of the series of sermons being preached this Lenten season on personalities who were caught up, inescapably, in the final chapter of our Lord's life here on earth prior to the crucifixion. Sunday by Sunday we've taken a good look at some of them, asking ourselves whether or not the sin by which they lived, which brought about the death of Jesus Christ, could also be our sin.

Don't ask me just which sin it was that brought about the death of Christ, I can't answer you.----I only know it was sin, a variety of kinds. Put them all together and no one individual, it might be said, was more responsible than anybody else for the death of Jesus Christ. Yet on the other hand, there are those who tell us that what happened on Calvary is still going on today. If we can believe that Jesus Christ comes to us in this our time, then there is always the possibility on our part either to accept Him or to reject Him.....and to reject Him is to crucify Him. So we've tried to learn a thing or two as we have focused upon these personalities of another year, saying to ourselves that the sins of yesteryear are also the sins of today.

The final subject for our consideration is the last man who had any official relationship to Jesus Christ before He was crucified, a man by the name of Pontius Pilate. As has been true for every sermon in this series, there is a Scriptural foundation. Today, however, it's a bit unusual. I give you not one text, but two texts, because these two Scriptural passages belong together. They are both from the 19th chapter according to John - - they are twelve verses apart. First the 4th verse:

"Pilate therefore went forth again and said unto them, Behold I bring him forth to you that you may know that I find no **fault** in him . . . "

...twelve verses away, the 16th verse of the 19th chapter of the Gospel according to John, speaking of Pilate:

"Then delivered he him therefore unto them
to be crucified, and they took Jesus and
led him away . . . "

...two texts, John 19:4 - John 19:16 -- they belong together. One ought not be read without reference to the other. How so? Simply because they are illustrative of the basic weakness of one man's character, a man by the name of Pilate.

We ought to so examine him and his conduct, lest we succumb to the same kind of behavior. For Pilate gives the impression of a man who knew what he ought to do, but he could never quite get himself around to doing it.

- - let me emphasize that by reading it again for you:

Pilate gives the impression of a man who knew what he
ought to do, but he could never quite get himself
around to doing it.

The outstanding theologian that the Lutheran Church has produced in this our day, the most perceptive thinker among us, I dare say, is Joseph Sittler. He used to lecture to some of his students and invariably he'd speak in this way, and I think I am quoting him directly:

"There comes a time when a man must do what
he ought to do . . . "

....there comes a time when a man must do what he ought to do. Pontius Pilate was in that situation - - there was something that he should have done, but Pontius Pilate, as long as memory remains in the mind of man, will be remembered as the man who did not do what he should have done.

You read this 19th chapter of the Gospel according to John and as you're

exposed to this man's character you keep asking yourself: Will he - or won't he? ...Will he - or won't he? He seems to vacillate, and in and through it all the impression remains: it wasn't that he did not know what should have been done - - - it's simply that he lacked the courage to do it.

Are you willing to accept this, my friend, that a man can know what he ought to do? There are those who tell me, and particularly men who have positions of great responsibility, that their problem lies in the fact that when they have to make a decision, they're not quite certain in their own mind just what it is that they ought to do. And this causes them all kinds of frustrations. They say that the nature of our complex society and political and economic order is such today that it's never really a cut-and-dried matter, never really between the spectrum of black and white, but a decision that has to be made within the varying degrees of gray, and this further complicates their problem. A man has to be very careful when he reasons like that, lest he seek to excuse himself from the moment of truth, when it can be made plain to him - - either this...or that. And the one more so than the other.

Did it ever occur to you how fortunate we Christians are -- we are the children of the Heavenly Father, and we can draw the benefit of the Holy Spirit. Now when God made us, as the Good Book reminds us, He made us in His image, in His likeness. And what does that mean if it doesn't mean this: to be able to think the thoughts of God, to be able to allow the fact of God to become operative in and through us.....this I most certainly believe.

Now because this is true, it is possible for a man to know what God wants done, if only he honestly wants to find out. It may take a while sometimes to have that fact confirmed, but he who wills to know - - - . It's the work of the Holy Spirit, you know. Martin Luther reminds us that we are enlightened

by the Spirit of God. Not only enlightened -- and prepare yourself for the comfort that can be rightfully yours, we can not only know but we can be empowered and enabled to do what is right.

But Pontius, Pilate is remembered as the man who, so it seemed, knew what should have been done but he never got himself around to doing it. Now why? I think I can tell you.

I don't think that Pontius Pilate ever really wanted to know what God wanted done. Pontius Pilate is the man who was more sensitive to knowing what people wanted done. His antenna was always out as to what people might think. And what people might think and what God might think are not always the same! A curse be upon that man who said, "The voice of the people is the voice of God" - - - it is not always so. How else can you account for the crucifixion?.....for there surely the voice of the people was not the voice of God. But Pontius Pilate was very sensitive as to what people might think.

....that's why he was caught up with those crâss-cross currents -- he was very sensitive as to what his superior might think, what Caesar thought. And then when those people came with their ace card, they boxed him in, they said, "If you let this man go, you're not Caesar's friend!" That did it! He was afraid that he might get the disfavor of Caesar.....and he sacrificed Jesus Christ, the truth.

Then when he heard how the mob was going, and he knew that he could not afford to go against the stem of the tide of the mob, very sensitive to what people might think, he sacrificed Jesus Christ. That was the weakness of Pontius Pilate -- giving the impression of a man who knew what should have been done, but lacking the courage to do it.

Poor Jesus....I say it respectfully....He just never had a chance. And

that's very especially so in that last week. Look at the record -- Annas and Caiaphas -- they represented the so-called church of that day, and when they brought Jesus in front of these men, what happened? They said, "You're too religious!" They said, "You blaspheme! -- you believe too much about God! You're identifying yourself with God!".....on the other hand, when he appeared before Herod and Pilate, they represented the government. And they said, "You're too political!" -- and then on the other hand, they said, "You're something less than a super-patriot".....He never had a chance, simply because they were of the mind that they weren't going to give Him a chance.

And every single one of us right now is student enough of human nature to know, if you don't want to believe in a person, if you don't want to believe in a thing, you can always find reasons to justify your position. And man perhaps never stoops quite as low as when he goes looking, crawling around, to find reasons by which he can reject the truth.

So it was with Pontius Pilate, a man who gives the impression of knowing what he should have done, but never really wanting to do it. Now remember how those two texts go:

Pilate coming out and saying, "I find no fault in this man"
...and then twelve verses later, Pilate coming and saying, "Go ahead! -- take him!"

This is an age of graffiti. No matter where you look these days, on posters or walls, you find scribbling and scrawling...and every now and then something pungent, something very cleverly said. As profound as any graffiti that I've read these days: "Not To Decide Is To Decide"

....Pilate's Exhibit A -- not to decide for Jesus Christ, he signed the death warrant. Could there be any greater sin?

* * *

"BEYOND TEARS"
(Luke 19:41)

LET NOT the world, O God, with its
distractions, keep us from paying
attention to Thy word, even now, in
this place. Through Jesus Christ,
Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

The sermon on this Palm Sunday bears the title "Beyond Tears," and the text, it's the 41st verse of the 19th chapter of the Gospel according to Luke:

"And when he was come near, he beheld the
city, and wept over it."

As youngsters we knew a measure of delight in going to different adults, to this adult and to that adult, and saying, quite proud of our knowledge, of course, "Do you know what the shortest verse in the Bible is?" Like as not they would look at us with amazement and admit that they didn't know what the shortest verse in the Bible is. And then, quite pleased with ourselves, we'd say, "The shortest verse in the Bible is John 11:35. It consists of only two words: 'Jesus wept.'"

Most people cry. Children quite naturally cry much more than adults, very much more. Fewer men cry, no doubt, than women. Some people cry quite easily....others seldom cry. Nonetheless, it can be said that most people cry at some time or another, for some one reason or perchance a variety of reasons.

Our Blessed Lord cried. Again, here and there in Scripture, you find

reference to the fact that Jesus wept. Quite frankly, I'm glad that He did, for in doing so, His humanity touches ours. With perhaps the gift of a sanctified imagination, picture now as best you can certain times and occasions when Jesus cried....

...I find no difficulty at all in admitting that He'd cry as a baby cries, with uncontrollable hunger pangs, He would cry....and His crying would serve as a warning signal for Mary, the blessed mother, to bare her breasts and to feed Him . . .

...I have no difficulty whatsoever imagining Jesus, dark-haired, dark-eyed, olive-skinned youngster that He was, working in the carpenter shop....and then there was that day, for the first time that He could remember, that He ran a splinter into His finger....He was somewhat frightened. He would cry.....

...I find no difficulty whatsoever in believing that on more than one occasion Jesus on His way home, having been playing down the street, as He headed for that house in Nazareth, could smell the aroma of freshly-baked bread, and He wanted so much to be there just as His mother would bring it from the hearth.....and as He ran eagerly, boyish-like, He stubbed His toe, and would not hold back the tearsit hurt that much....

....I find no difficulty in believing that Jesus Christ, as

a young adult walked into the carpenter shop one morning and He sensed that something was different in the mind and the spirit of Joseph. He pressed hard until Joseph gave Him an explanation - - "Jesus, do you remember how hard we worked on that yoke for the oxen? -- it was handsomely hand-crafted, and how smoothly we polished it. Well, the man who got that yoke for the oxen left town last night! I told him he could pay us next week. They tell us, Jesus, he's a deadbeat, and we'll probably never see him again ! . . "

....I have no difficulty whatsoever in believing that Jesus cried - - not just because Joseph was being short-changed, but because He was coming face-to-face with the fact that there were people like that in this world, who take advantage of other people and who spoil it for a great number of other folk . . .

. . . I find no difficulty at all in believing that Jesus cried when as a man of 30 years, He turned His back upon the carpenter shop, never again to pick up the hammer, the adze and the saw, and took farewell of kinsfolk and acquaintance . . .

. . . I likewise believe that when He found such solace and comfort in that home in Bethany, where his friends Mary, Martha and Lazarus lived, and how once when He came to Bethany, they took Him to task as only friends can take a friend to

task, and said, "If you'd have been here sooner, Lazarus, our brother, would not have died!".....so Jesus cried.

Today is Palm Sunday, and the Church remembers how on that Palm Sunday so long ago Jesus looked over the city of Jerusalem. And as He looked over the city of Jerusalem He could not keep the tears back....He cried. Why did He cry?

-- some people cry without any reason at all

-- some people cry for any number of different reasons, or all of them put together

-- some people cry when physical pain is so great they can't stand it

-- some people cry when the emotional burden is far more than they can carry, and they are moved to tears.

Jesus had a reason for crying, or He would never have wept. Yet on the surface it looks to us as though He ought not to have cried, because in that moment in His life He had everything going for Him. Hadn't He wanted to visit the city? Wasn't He about to make a triumphal entry? -- wouldn't there be ringing in His ears "Hosanna"? The only untoward thing about the whole event would be that some people would say, "Hush the people up! They're making too much noise! Tone the demonstration down a bit!" - - and even though Jesus Christ knew what was ahead of Him, nonetheless He marched into the city defiantly - - He was still master of the situation. No reason to cry then, was there?

Ah, but there was. For Jesus Christ looked ahead. And He knew very well what was going to happen before the week was over. He would be crucified. So Jesus Christ cried.....not for himself, mark you. We have to make much of

that. Because a great deal of your crying and my crying is for ourselves. We cry because we've been hurt. We cry because our pride has suffered a blow. We cry because we've been disappointed, we've been disillusioned, we've been defeated. We cry because of what happens to us.

...Jesus Christ was crying because of what was going to happen to them - - they were the ones who would reject Him, they were the ones who would crucify Him. And within His own disciple band there would be numbered those who would declare Him a defeated person. Who'd call it a victorious thing when your master, and the one whom you chose to follow, ends up on a cross? - - who wants to be part of any kind of failure like that? And He knew how great their disappointment would be in His apparent defeat. So Jesus Christ cried.

In anticipation of all of that He might have reacted as some of us would react and say, "Well, I've had it! I can't take another step! I'm going to stop right here. I don't have to go on -- it isn't worth it!"

...for Jesus Christ might have said to himself, "Even though I die, they will still go on killing one another, they will still go on cheating one another. For any number of people my death on Calvary won't make any difference whatsoever." And the sad truth is this: for any number of people it hasn't made any difference! - - because they go on passing by just as though it never happened.....so Jesus Christ might have said to himself, it's not worth it! -- and as He would cry His heart out He would be blinded by His tears, and He wouldn't take another step forward.

But Jesus Christ did. And Palm Sunday reminds us that He was able to see beyond His tears. There was still a day's work to be done. There was still a place and a point in history when the supreme example of life and of

love had to be demonstrated. I submit to you this morning that as long as God gives us breath, as long as God gives us life, there is a purpose to be served. You and I dare not reach the point where we can say, in the face of God, "This is it! No more! No farther!" God's purpose is always to be served. And this is what we must remember when the tears are about to blind us - - - beyond the tears is another chapter to be written, another day to be lived. The meaning of the Lenten season is caught up for us in a very classic expression, which is a quotation of Scripture. It's the Lenten sentence which we use after the Epistle has been read: "Christ hath humbled himself and become obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." We dare not be blinded to the fact that we are still here to do something for God beyond our tears.

Why do I preach this way to you today? Anyone who has had the good fortune to listen in on human hearts for more than three decades knows that by this time most people have suffered some kind of defeat and disillusionment. And most people may have reached the point where they say, "I wonder if it's worth going on?"....and then our tears come. And if we don't watch out, we can be so blinded by our tears that we haven't the faintest idea that there's still another step to be taken, and another day to be lived.

The members of this congregation, once I have received the information, receive a birthday greeting from their Senior Pastor. It's something, you know, that's been going on for some time. I want you to know that when that signature is affixed, it's always affixed with a prayer. My name is not just signed casually....even though sometimes it's scarcely legible. But with the signing of my name there goes a prayer for the person to whom that birthday greeting has been addressed.

The message that appears on the birthday greeting is a different one for each year, and the message is carefully chosen. It's time, now, to choose the next year's birthday greeting message. The selection has been made. It's already gone to the printer. Perhaps you'd like to know in advance what it is - - it's so apropos the message of today's sermon. It will read something like this:

"Let me greet you on your birthday with
the words of Lacordaire, the old philosopher
who said: 'I do not know what tomorrow will
bring, but I do know that Providence will
rise before the sun.'"

It's this fundamental truth that held Jesus Christ in good stead, that He might be able to see beyond the tears. He was guaranteed the sure and certain knowledge that the sustaining, never-failing hand of God would support Him. Don't ever let your tears blind you to that truth!

* * * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"A SERMON FOR EASTER"

Through Jesus Christ, Thy Son,
our Blessed Lord, crucified,
risen from the dead. Amen.

I can think of no better way to greet you on this glad Easter Day than to greet you in the words of another preacher, who on another Easter Day looked out over his congregation and said something like this:

"We are here today for one of two reasons:
either because we believe that Easter is
true; or because we wish it were."

George Bernard Shaw, both good and naughty man of letters, in one of his foul moods, lashed out against the human race. He exclaimed that if there should be other planets that would be inhabited, then surely this planet of ours would serve as their insane asylum.

Bernard Shaw is not the first to think like that. He, as many others have done, brand our world as being mad. As they look out upon the horizon, with eyes dimmed by some bitter and brutal experience, they see a perpetually cast shadow hanging over us.

How is it with you, my friend? Would you say that it is as bad as all that? Any number of people maintain that it is. And the tragedy of our day may not be that people live in the darkness of the night. The tragedy may lie in the fact that they live in the darkness which is day, because for person after person his every waking moment is a misery to be endured. Perchance for more people than we care to admit, if they were to choose a theme song, it could be "Stop The World -- I Want To Get Off."

What with the philosopher there is in each of us, we try to figure it out: does life have a meaning? does life have a purpose? is life worth living? Just when we think that we have a workable solution, it could be that something untoward and unexpected comes upon us, and the very foundations of our faith are shaken. It takes a great deal of discipline to hold ourselves against succumbing to the kind of thinking that characterized Bertrand Russell when he wrote in his "A Free Man's Worship" that man's life is brief and powerless, that on him and on his race the slow sure doom falls pitiless and dark. He is blind to both good and to evil. He says man is condemned today to lose his dearest, and tomorrow himself to pass through the gate of darkness.

Occasionally we quote Omar Khayyam in a cynical mood.....he wrote:

"Into this universe, and why not knowing,
Nor whence, like water willy-nilly flowing;
And out of it, as wind along the waste,
I know not whither, willy-nilly blowing - -

"Tis all a checquer-board of Nights and Days
Where Destiny with Men for pieces plays;
Hither and thither moves, and mates, and slays,
And one by one back in the closet lays."

I presume it is at this point that Germany's popular theologian and preacher, Helmut Theilecke, touches a sensitive nerve for many of us. In his excellent book "The Christian's Creed" he talks about Marlene Dietrich as she sang so poignantly:

"Where have all the flowers gone?
Young girls picked them everyone - - -

Where have all the young girls gone?
Gone to young men, every one - - -
Where have all the young men gone?
Gone to soldiers, every one - - -

"Where have all the soldiers gone?
Gone to graveyards everyone
Where have all the graveyards gone?
Gone to flowers everyone "

Observed the German preacher, as he mused, "thus the round of questions begins again; the circle, the cycle turns back upon itself, and one could ask the song's questions over and over while the shadow of the riddle grew larger around us and the voice of the singer wore thin. But the song does stop. Marlene Dietrich goes off stage, and as she makes her exit she sings, asking the question: "When will they ever learn? When will they ever learn?"

Learn what? that life is as she pictured it -- one meaningless cycle that goes on repeating itself, doom, death and destruction? My cup overflows as I stand before you now, because I am in a position to remind you of what you already know, that once there was a Man who broke that cycle....once there was a Man who said by the quality and the integrity of his life, there is something beyond the grave - - death in God's sight is not the end. For His is one grave, as it's been put, from whence more than mere flowers grow!

We are of the 20th century. It's been said of us that ours is a century of dashed hopes. Hardly begins, there was World War I. We said it was a war to defend democracy, to make the entire world safe for democracy. But now the question goes on being asked: where is ~~there~~ democracy in this world, as a man would hope for it, and dream for it. There was a President of the United States, once World War I was over, who said, "Now back to normalcy" ...and the question of our day is simply this: what is normalcy? There was the League of Nations upon which we banked so much, only to give way to the United Nations.....and where is the man who has kept faith and trust that the United Nations should bring about the panacea for all peoples on the face

of the earth.

After World War II -- Korea. After Korea -- Southeast Asia. And against the world's background constantly boiling, the Middle East. Alas and alack, there are those who tell us that even if we should pull out of Vietnam, even though we might have cessation of hostility in Southeast Asia, it simply means that the day after tomorrow, whenever that might happen, we'll be engaged somewhere else. So we of the 20th century have been forced to think. And we listen to the prophets of doom.

There are those who continue to maintain that ours is a generation upon which a darkened shadow remains perpetually cast. Today's sermon has a text, of course it has: the first verse of the 20th chapter of the Gospel according to John:

"Then the first day of the week came Mary
Magdalene, early, while it was still dark,
to the tomb . . ."

" . . . while it was still dark" . . . for hers, too, was an age with a darkened shadow cast upon it, and the shadow of the death of her Lord and her Saviour hung heavily upon her . . . "Yet while it was still dark . . ." she was drawn irresistibly by a power and by a force, even God Himself, to a grave, to discover there what only God could proclaim:

"He is not here...He is risen, even as He said . . ."

Professor Hocking of Harvard said, "Despite all the negative evidence that you may amass, once you have something positive, it annihilates all the negative that has been accumulated against it." Mary Magdalene had been battered around quite a bit in life. Her soul, like her body, had been bruised by those who exploited her. Life has a way of exploiting us -- leav-

ing us broken and bruised. But not in a world that gives us Jesus Christ will a man be left without some hope. Mary Magdalene had encountered Jesus Christ. He was her morning star....He was the light of her life and the joy of her heart. And once she had met Him, she knew that life was never meant to end in defeat. So she was drawn irresistibly toward an empty gravenot even knowing at the time that she was being drawn to it, that the grave would be empty. But once she had encountered Jesus Christ she refused to believe that death and defeat could be final - - "hope springs eternal in the human breast . . "

For shame upon us that we listen all too often to prophets of doom...for shame upon us that we allow the inexperienced to presumably read life realistically for us as the young writer -- let me remind you of him again -- who took as the setting of his novel that mining town in Pennsylvania....

...the young son was fed up with life in that tiny town...he wanted to go to the big city...he wanted to try his wings. So he told his mother he was leaving. Wise by the years, she said, "Go - - but let me tell you, if when you are out in that world by yourself you become broken and bleeding, no matter what happens to you, know full well that if you come home, and you stand on the brow of the hill and you look down upon our little hut, there will always be a light in the window waiting for you to come back."

....so the author has the young chap going off to the big city, and just as his mother had prophesied, it all

took place and like the Prødìgal of old, he heads
back home.....but the young writer says, when he
got to the top of the hill and looked down upon his
house, there was the house, alright, but there was no
light in the window.....

...he took his novel to an experienced writer, considerably older in years, and
asked him to pass judgment on it. And the old author read what he had written,
and he came to the final paragraph -- he jumped from his chair, and he said,
"You devil, you! -- you write that last paragraph over and put that light back
in the window!" The prophets of doom, defeat and destruction may tell you that
the light is always going to go out. Easter reminds us of God's eternal flame,
of light and of love and of truth. For once there lived One, on this earth,
who ~~put~~^{by} the power of God lived triumphantly. And this becomes our hope.

"Alas for him who never sees
The stars shine through his cypress trees;
Who hopeless lays his dead away, and lingers not
To see the mournful marble's play;
Who hath not learned in hours of pain
The truth, the sins in flesh unknown,
That life is ever lord of death,
And love -- God's kind of love -- never loses its own."

And that's why you can have the peace of God that passes all understand-
ing to keep your hearts and minds through Jesus Christ. Amen.

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"A MAN NAMED THOMAS"

O GOD, We have so little time to do
the sort of thing that claims our
attention now. By Thy Holy Spirit,
enable us to make the most of it,
even now. Through Jesus Christ,
Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

Over at Princeton University, there is a tradition that one one night a number of years ago, Aaron Burr -- you recognize the name, don't you? -- was invited to attend a religious revival. A distinguished revivalist, whose name I do not now recall, had come to Princeton, and he wanted to make the most of the opportunity of witnessing for Jesus Christ to the student generation. Aaron Burr did not go. But the invitation, however, did something for Aaron Burr -- it brought into focus again the fact of God: would he be a believer? -- or would he not be a believer? Aaron Burr took it that seriously.

After some thought, he made it known to his friends that he wasn't about to go to the meeting. But this he would do -- he would go to his own room, and there he'd wrestle with the matter: would he believe in God? -- or wouldn't he believe in God? -- and once he'd arrive at a decision, he'd let the whole world know. Tradition has it that before midnight, the shutters on the windows of his room were thrown open, and with a loud voice Aaron Burr was heard to exclaim: "Goodbye, God!" Now that's the way, presumably, he settled it.

It might be something if it could be done as simply as all that. A man faces up to the fact: do I believe in God? or don't I believe in God? Alright, I'll make up my mind that I don't believe in Him and that's it!...well then,

what happens to what Julian Huxley said is "the God-shaped blank in the heart of every man" -- what happens to that? The Scriptures tell us that we were made in God's likeness.....and if you want a free translation of that, or better still, an interpretation, it could mean that we were meant to respond to God, that we were meant to trust in God, that we were meant to believe in God. Julian Huxley is absolutely right when he says that down deep in the heart of every man there is this God-shaped blank that only God can fill.

What now do you make of it? If you were hard-pressed, if you were locked up in your room, separated from other people, wrestling with the truth, the truth of God -- how might you respond? Could you fervently say, "I do believe!"...or could you in all honesty say, "I do not believe." Could it be something that's an either/or proposition? Could it be that a man either believes or he doesn't believe? If I understand the Christian religion aright, I think I have to proclaim to you that there is a thin line, but there is a line, between belief and unbelief. And the line of demarcation is determined by those who respond to what God offers and those who do not respond.

I think I would have to go so far as to tell you that I honestly believe that there is no such thing as a "doubter's gate" to Heaven. And in the final analysis, a man either believes in Jesus Christ, or he doesn't.

This is the Sunday after Easter. You heard it said last Sunday that Easter is the Christian's Great Day. And that's a good way of putting it, because Easter deals with the tremendous truth of the Christian religion.

The central truth of the Christian religion is Jesus Christ. Remove Jesus Christ from the Christian religion and you don't have a Christian religion. And what is it that Christians were meant to believe about Jesus Christ?

- not simply that He was another teacher
- not simply that He was another preacher
- not simply that He was another miracle-worker
- not simply that He was one who gave Himself to a
worthy cause....

...but Christians are led to believe that Jesus Christ is God-come-to-us-in-the-flesh...who suffered...who died...and rose again. Because He lives, we too shall live is a cardinal truth of the Christian religion.

Now. Do you believe it? Or don't you believe it?

And if you should believe it, do you believe it enthusiastically? I tell you quite parenthetically now, that by noon on Monday morning I had made my own personal evaluation of this past Holy Week season in Saint Luke Church....my own evaluation of Palm Sunday....my own evaluation of the Easter Day. And I've recorded it, that I might go back and check it again in anticipation of the celebration next year -- how might we improve? -- what ought we not to have done? -- how can we better mark the occasion?

One of the things that I regret very much is that we have yet to become a congregation that can gather on an Easter Day, and where somebody can stand up in front of you and say: "The Lord is risen!" - - and immediately, without any hesitation, have as it were a spontaneous expression -- as with one voice to have everybody say: "THE LORD IS RISEN INDEED!"

...we haven't done that lately, maybe because we're afraid to attempt it, lest the response be far from enthusiastic - - and that would be a lamentable

thing to throw in the face of Jesus Christ on the Christian's Great Day.

Jesus Christ is risen.....do you believe it? Well, let me be very frank with you. It isn't easy for some people to believe it. If you were to press me and say, "Pastor, what have the years taught you in your pastoral ministry?" - - I think I could tell you quite frankly that I've discovered that you can put people into two categories when you talk about religious faith and conviction. There are some people who find it quite easy to believe, and there are other ~~people~~ people who find it quite difficult. And you and I ought to recognize it.

Today's sermon on this Sunday after Easter has a text. The text is from the Gospel for the day, the 20th chapter of John, the text, the 24 - 25 verses:

" - - Thomas, one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came.
The other disciples therefore said unto him,
We have seen the Lord. But he said unto them,
Except I shall see in his hands the print of
the nails, and put my finger into the print
of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side,
I will not believe."

..it's on this basis that I tell you, even if my own experience had not proven it, that there are some people who do not believe easily.

Let's go back now just for a second. The text reads:

" ... but Thomas, one of the twelve - - "

...ah, yes -- he was inside the disciple group! And Jesus Christ made place for a person like that. Whenever you think of the twelve, my friend, think of them as a variety. As you've heard me tell you before -- no two alike, just as no two members of your family are alike. There was variety by way of temperament and personality and even in degrees of commitment and capability...

" . . Thomas, one of the twelve - - " - - - one of a variety of

people, who in this case has a distinction all of his own: he was the kind of a man who did not believe easily.

There are people like that. I am quite sure that if you and I constituted a little travel group, maybe there were 10, 12, 15 of us, and you were in charge of the group, and one morning you said, "Let's change the itinerary -- I've just gotten on good authority that five miles down the road is a spot that we ought not to miss -- how many of you would like to go with me?"

...and if you've ever been caught up in a group like that, you may readily recognize what I'm going to tell you ---- maybe all but one. For the one person is a little bit reluctant. He's not so sure that he wants to deviate from the established schedule. He doesn't quite know what it is that he's getting himself into. He's not just about to take somebody else's word for it. This may prove aggravating, it may prove annoying, and yet the man has a perfect right to react that way.

I remember when I first took a group to Europe. I said to a very able person who had been caught up in this business for several decades: "Tell me, what do you think are the qualifications for a good group leader?" And immediately she replied out of her experience, "Firmness...and patience." ...which leads me to say to you, that whenever we deal with other people we may have to ask God to give us a measure of patience, in order that the end that ought to be accomplished could be realized.

And that's exactly the example that we have in our Blessed Lord. How did He deal with Thomas, who found it difficult to believe so easily as the others had believed? They came in with their great enthusiasm -- "We have seen the Lord!".....and then Thomas says, quietly, slowly -- implying, well,

maybe that's alright for you, but as far as I'm concerned, I'll need some proof.....

...how did our Lord deal with Thomas?

You're not forgetting now, he was one of the Twelve -- which simply reminds us that he was one of the Master's men to begin with. Jesus Christ deals with him patiently: "If it's proof you need, Thomas, alright -- I will meet you where you are -- stretch forth your hand -- let me see your finger -- go ahead!".....Thomas exclaims, "My Lord and my God!"

....He didn't have to do it. So he responded to the patience that our Blessed Lord had with him.

Let me say to you now in closing, I think the very first thing that Jesus Christ exacts from any person is that he be absolutely honest. That gives Jesus Christ a chance to begin, then. And Thomas was absolutely honest....it just wasn't easy for him to believe. Then, if the Lord Jesus Christ is to make any progress with us, in the limitations that we bring to Him as far as faith and trust are concerned, we serve Him and ourselves better if we indicate a willingness to be shown. Read the Scriptures carefully. Even though Thomas said, "Unless I can do this, I will not believe," he did not say, "Even though I will do this, I will not believe." In his response to Jesus Christ he gave an indication of his willingness to want to be shown. And there is always hope for any person who is willing to give God a chance to prove His case.

As a pastor I think the thing that disturbs me most, as I would experience the joy of sharing my Saviour with other people, is the way people will close their minds and not even give a person a chance to talk to them about

Jesus Christ, or to prove to them how it is possible to believe.

How goes it with you, my friend? Believer? -- or unbeliever?

A group of men one time sat around a fireside by the ocean's edge, and they were talking one to the other, of the misfortunes that had come to them. One man said his was the tragic loss of reversal in business...he had lost a fortune. Another man said, "I have lost my wife, and my son." Another man said, "I no longer believe.".....and all the others, as with one voice, said, "Sad losses we have met, but yours is sadder yet -- the believing heart is gone from you!"

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

This is not the sermon that I had planned to preach at this hour. *
The sermon that I am preaching right now is not the same sermon that I had preached at 8:30. But as I listened to you sing, a divine impulse, I am pleased to refer to it, laid hold upon me, and I want to talk to you about the kind of thing that you sang into our hearts just a short while ago, and the kind of thing which, please God, has motivated you to have done so magnificently, according to the reports that we've received, this past week in Florida.

Here are the words that you sang into our hearts:

"It's my world and it's your world, too,
But there's an awful lot that we both can do,
If we try, really try, if we try.
There's so much hate, hate and despair,
If you'll look around, it's ev'rywhere;
But why, tell me why, won't you tell me why,
Please tell me why. . . "

...let's stop at that point.

We who are older, and I hope you'll allow me to speak in their behalf at this moment, say to you that we are very, very sorry that this is the kind of a world that we expose you to, because those of us who have reached mid-point in life and perhaps a bit beyond, are quite aware of the fact that it's not nearly the world that we'd dreamed and that we'd hoped for. We do have our moments when we have to be very careful lest we become cynical and say, is this the world for which we have worked? - - is this the world

(This sermon was preached following the anthem-song
from "Natural High" - the folk musical about God's
Son - by the cast of senior high young people)

that's the end product of our dreaming? No matter where you may look, you're absolutely right as you have sung it: "There's so much hate, and there is so much despair" - - - and you have a perfect right to ask the question: Tell me why.

Part of the crowning glory of youth is that you will ask questions. May you always ask the right question, and may you always look for the right answer. The trouble with a good many people is that they spend too much time asking questions that really don't matter. And sometimes the church is faulted for giving answers to questions that the world itself does not ask. And maybe part of our job together is to sort out the right questions, and then to make certain that we give the right answer. . . . Why? -- so much hate and despair?

But let's go on. You don't stop your singing at that point, and thank God you didn't:

"I'll tell you
There once lived a Man with a plan
That showed us how to live together.
It takes love, more than we've got,
And He only can provide love . . . "

...you're right!

There once lived a Man (capital M) -- and He had a plan. We'd like to believe, those of us who are older, that what we have been trying to share with you you've already caught....

...this is the end result of our Sunday School teaching
...this is the end result of our preaching
...this is the end result of our catechetical instruction
...this is the end result of what your parents have
tried to do as they've set before you the example

of Jesus Christ.....

This is the thing that distinguishes you from other people. It's Jesus Christ who makes the difference. And we who are of the Christian church keep talking about the fact that there once lived a Man who was so different -- none ever like Him.

What was so different about Him?

...He was hungry as other people became hungry....He became tired as other people became tired....He became weary as other people became weary.....He was exposed to everything in this world that you and I are exposed to....

...what was the difference? - - there always remained in Him and through Him the undeniable fact of God.

You ought to understand the difference in case you haven't understood it before. But what you and I profess in the Creeds, in a classic expression -- is really the outgrowth of what people once knew as they talked with one another. Once upon a time, I dare say, people would talk about this Man-with-a-plan. And when they remembered Him, they remembered Him as being so different. I've said to you just now, the difference lies in the fact that He was undeniably God...anytime...anywhere....completely and perfectly! And how did that come out in the Creed?

" - very God of very God, begotten, not

made, being of one substance with the Father - - - "

....that's the way it comes out in the Creed: never less than God.

And because He was never less than God, He was always representing God's point of view here on this earth. When He saw the hate and despair, as you and I have seen it, He did not wring His hands and go off in some corner and

say, "Is this the best they could have given to me and to my generation?"

He did not go off and withdraw and say: "There isn't anything that I can do!"

But one day He went to church, and He stood up, and He read.....and then He sat down. And then He stood and He spoke. And when He spoke He said something like this:

"Today -- what I have read to you from Scripture
is going to be fulfilled, and it's going to be
fulfilled through Me. The plan that God has in
mind for His world is going to become a reality - "

He might have said to himself, I am one, and only one -- that means I as one person can do something.....and then you can read for yourself in the Gospel according to Luke, how He charted for Himself His personal platform, His personal program. And from that moment on, Jesus Christ completely enunciated, Jesus Christ completely personified God's plan for this world.

And simply speaking, what is God's plan? - - to love, and to help, and to begin where you are, with what you have, with the person nearest at hand. I do not have a spiritual X-ray, and if I did have, I'm not so sure that I would use it on you, but it might be good spiritual discipline to discover how much you exercise this measure of Christ's love -- within your own group, while you were on tour. Because every single one of us has his own weaknesses - - every single one of us has his own limitations.

Had I begged and cajoled the Assistant Pastor to take me along with youand suppose he had.....it could well be that by Thursday night of this past week I could have gotten on the nerves of some of you - - - and since you smile so broadly and spontaneously, I might just as well admit that some of

might have gotten on my nerves! -- by Tuesday! This is our lot as human beings, and when that happens, because we are Christian, we draw back a bit, re-group our strength, and deal with one another...patiently....honestly....kindly.

" . . There once lived a Man with a plan
That showed us how to live together.
It takes love, more than we've got,
And He only can provide love. . . "

...I don't know whether I should tell you this -- maybe you ought to find it out for yourself -- maybe it isn't even necessary that I tell you this, but there are some of us who have noble intentions, honestly we do....we want to be good, and we want to be loving. But the trouble is, we run out of love. Our resources run a bit dry -- that's just because we're human. And none of us, I presume, ever has enough love to make it quite on his own. And that's why you and I have to come back to Him, to get from Him what He's got. He only can replenish us with love. And that's what God had in mind at the very beginning: "For God so loved the world that He gave - - ".....and God never runs out of love.

The Assistant Pastor has a younger brother, as you may know. He doesn't do it very often (I wish he would do it more often than he does) - - but every now and then he sends me a clipping. Once he sent me a cartoon, I think from the New Yorker. It showed a certain character of this generation who was walking down the street and saw on the church board the sign that read:

LOVE ONE ANOTHER

...and the character simply stops and scratches his head and says, "Too bad that the idea never caught on." I challenge you to prove to the world that the idea has caught on.

"It's my world and it's your world, too,
But there's an awful lot that we both can do,
If we try, really try, if we try.
There's so much hate, hate and despair,
If you'll look around, it's ev'rywhere;
But why, tell me why, won't you tell me why,
Please tell me why.

I'll tell you
There once lived a Man with a plan
That showed us how to live together.
It takes love, more than we've got,
and He only can provide love.

He's the One who was sent from God,
Who on the earth among us trod,
And with love He showed us how to live."

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"INTO THE WORLD'S UGLY FACE"
(Ephesians 6:11)

Through Jesus Christ, Thy Son
our Lord. Amen.

At some distance I have followed rather closely two Broadway hits. Totally unrelated, each in its own way has spoken to me -- "Fiddler On The Roof" -- with its very charm and warm regard for tradition....a very welcome thing in this our day when it's become so easy for us to ignore our past.

...then the other one, so very, very different -- "West Side Story" ...I don't turn to the sound-track of "West Side Story" if I want my soul to be strangely warmed or quieted. I turn to it when I'm forced to recognize all over again how terribly real the fact of evil is in this world.

Two episodes come to mind from "West Side Story." One, the old character, the old gent who keeps the store where some of the gang have found it a very easy thing to hang out. He happens to be the kind of a chap who has been tolerant of young people. He's never lost his love for them. Unfortunately, however, they press him to the point where he becomes exhausted, exasperated....and one day he yells to one of the characters in "West Side Story" -- "You and your kind make this world lousy!" The character retorts to the old gent: "We don't make it lousy -- we found it that way!"

The other episode: The gang war is on. The characters disappear. Only three remain on the street. The one, left bleeding, close to death...the other is pulling the blade out from his body. And I think the third character -- is it Maria? -- who says, "O God, I wish it were yesterday!"

....take the two together now: "It's a lousy world" -and- "O God, I wish it were yesterday"

.....all of this is simply to say that life has a way of making us realize that the world dhas an ugly face, and we can't quite ignore it or escape it. You can't go back to yesterday. And the terrible truth about today is that it is as ugly as it is.

As some of you may know, I am by nature an optimistic person. Evaluating my own personality at this stage in life, I'm grateful for the fact that I think kindly of people, and I'm always looking for the optimistic point of view. I take no credit for that -- that's the way God endowed me at the beginning, and I try to keep it that way....not without some effort.

But the past few years have been a different story. Up until a year-and-a-half ago, I frankly admit in your presence now, my attitude towards life was almost becoming cynical. I hadn't quite prepared myself for the tension and the hostility that most certainly exist in this world. And I hope, now when I look back and I read some of the sermons that I've preached, that you didn't suffer too much because that happened to be true. I want to thank some of you for your prayers. I'm not at all unmindful of the way you lifted me up in the arms of your petitions, because some of you are that disciplined, by which you ask God to take care of your preacher, that he may never proclaim anything less than the full Gospel. I want to thank you.

And I want to thank also, those of you who, without any hesitation, took your side on the better issue and supported wholeheartedly what you knew in your heart to be right and proper in a world so troubled and torn, battered and bruised. I want to thank you. You've done more for me than you may realize. The very integrity of your soul has come through, and my debt to

you is very great.

I also recognize the truth of the fact that the claim of God's love upon my soul was never loosened by God.

There's still a fourth thing that needs to be mentioned. Every now and then I went back and I read about some of the people who lived in other days and in other years. And I gathered a measure of strength in the way they faced life when it showed an ugly face in their day. And I've come out now, because of what I've gathered from them, as an optimist ~~xxx~~, albeit a brooding optimist, and sometimes the emphasis and the accent more on the adjective than the noun. But be that as it may.

Which leads me to say to you now, that this sermon bears the title "Into the World's Ugly Face" with the text from the Apostle Paul, the 6th chapter of a letter that he wrote to Christians who lived in Ephesus, the 11th verse:

" - - to stand against the wiles of the devil."

I found it a very salutary thing to note that as far as the Apostle Paul was concerned, that he recognized that life could have an ugly face, and that the devil was still around, and that evil is a reality in the world. A man may not want to begin at that point, but he does well if he will, because this is no paradise. No matter how idealistic we may be in our endeavor to face life, it's not a paradise - - even on a day as beautiful as this, when all the created aspect of the natural world, colorfully displayed in front of us, reminds us of the goodness of our Creator.....still there are some of us who know as over against this background, there is man's hostility and man's hatred - - his unwillingness to believe that man can have a better side to his nature, who are always allowing themselves to become victimized by

suspicion and by hatred - - this is the world in which we live, and the devil is still let loose. The Apostle Paul began at that point. He said, there is a devil. But that isn't all that he said. He said, we have to learn to be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.

I'm not at all athletically inclined, and so I have to learn what I can from the world of athletics second-hand. Did I not read some time ago that one of the first responsibilities of the football coach, if he's going to be a good one, is when he meets the making of his team for the first time, and he has them out there on the field, that he does well if he teaches them how to fall -- because eventually they will become tackled -- the opposition is out there, it cannot be ignored. A man does well to recognize the truth that the life that he has to live is not without the enemy. And the enemy is the force of evil, always arrayed against those who would do the will of God.

Well thanks to the Apostle Paul, I'm beginning to learn that lesson all over again -- you begin with the fact that this world is not a paradise. You have to recognize the fact that there is always the possibility of evil raising its ugly head. And that's why you and I shouldn't be so shocked and surprised when we find it in some places and in some people.

The second thing that I've learned from the Apostle Paul is this: that even though there might be the dark night of the soul, when the world shows its ugly face, a man was meant to persevere with patience through it, and to learn of the fact of this because of the experience. Now you and I aren't about to react to it that way, generally speaking. And here's precisely where we make our mistake. When the world deals us a hard and a bitter blow, we're about to retreat, and we're not about to be pushed into a corner. So we withdraw. Yet this is God's world, even though it's not a paradise, and God

expects His people to remain in the world. Will you then be Christ's man in the place that God still intends for you to be found? That's the question with which a man may have to deal. The Apostle Paul did. And because he did, he talked about all the grand and wonderful things that happened to him, how he knew that the love of Christ remained -- how he could be able to say that "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." -- "I live, yet not I, but Christ lives in and through me." The example that he had, of course, was the example of Jesus Christ, who had to face Calvary. But beyond Calvary was God's last word and the demonstration of God's great and good power.

Now all of this, then, is to lead us to the conclusion that the world may show its ugly face, and evil is still loose, the devil is rampant in the world. Would you believe me if I tell you with all the ardor of my soul, that the devil never gets beyond second place. Evil is as powerful as it is, but it remains only the second most powerful force in the world. You don't have to be a loser, then -- you can be a winner, by the grace and the power of God.

I have been reading these days "Come Out Of The Wilderness" -- a documentary-of-sorts, that's what it is, of the East Harlem parish. A number of years ago a theologian and a preacher so recognized what a dark dungeon that part of New York actually was. What could be done about it? So these two men made up their minds that they would identify and participate fully in the community. They have done a tremendous thing.

One of them tells how he met a character who was 70 years of age, who had lived there all of his life. He was practically blind, no matter where he went he had to have the assistance of a cane. He records in "Come Out Of The Wilderness" the last conversation and confrontation that he had with Meatwell.

He discovered in his room a Bible. Part of the Bible was well-worn. And what part do you suppose it was? -- not the Gospel record -- the Psalms. Now mark it well, there's more than one kind of Psalm...

...some of the Psalms were written by men who cried out against life,
who cursed their fate

...some of the Psalms were written by men who wanted God to come to their
defense and to kill their enemies immediately...

...but some of the Psalms of this great religious literature are songs of praise and adoration. And that's the part of the Bible where this man, who might have cursed life and cursed his fate, found his greatest strength in which he was always giving God some kind of an Alleluia!

Let me encourage you, my friend, as a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, not by any strength of your own, but by the strength of God which is made available to you, to stand against the world's ugly face, in the sure and certain confidence that God has the last word, and in Him is the strength that alone remains. It is possible for you not to be afraid of anything...it is possible for you not to be afraid of anyone. For when God's love and God's peace possess your hearts, fear is taken away.....even when you have to face the world, evil as it may be.

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"WHEN GOOD MEN SUFFER"
(I Peter 2:20)

We have so little time, O God,
to give attention to Thy word.
Perhaps now for a little while
we may allow it to speak to us.
To that end we ask the blessing
of your Holy Spirit. Through
Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our
Lord. Amen.

I can only tell it to you as I heard it. I wasn't here. I only heard.
...it may have been 11:00 o'clock in the morning, or 2:00
o'clock in the afternoon, it doesn't make any difference. The fact is that
it was in broad daylight. He was an old gentleman, an octogenarian at that,
a man who once in his life felt the call of God to proclaim the saving grace
of Jesus Christ, whose daily life personified God's concern for people.
....he went to post a letter. Whether it happened on his way to the mail-
box or on the return, this I can't tell you. But somewhere he was laid hold
upon by five irascible youth...he was beaten....he was bloodied. He has
lost the sight of one eye. It could well be that he will never regain his
composure because of that unfortunate instance....

Now let me remind you again - - he is the kind of person of whom it could
be said, he would never hurt anyone. And he was motivated throughout the
years of his life to help people and to love people. Now you ask me why this
should happen to him? Why should a good man live so long and then have this
become the final chapter?

I can only tell it to you as I heard it.

....they always wanted to have a child. Then she gave birth.

it was to be their only child. They were profoundly grateful to God for the blessing, and they searched their souls and they said, how can we really say thank-you to God for this wonderful blessing? The answer for them was to become missionaries of the Lord Jesus Christ. And in that day, it was a day of great sacrifice to give up so much and to go to another land. Which they did.

...Not long after they were established in that other land, their daughter, their pride and their joy, contracted an incurable disease....and she died quickly....

Now ask me, will you -- they were so good and they were so grateful! Why should they have to suffer like this?

These are some of the facts of life. Goodness is no guarantee of safety nor security. Oh, we'd like to believe that God walks around with a huge giant-size umbrella in His hand, and when with a magnet-like in His other hand, He draws us to Him, we'd like to believe that as long as we're under that umbrella no hurt can come to us.

But the facts of life don't always spell it that way. That's why I've a little bit of trouble, why frankly I admit to you, when I read certain Psalms. After I've read the 91st Psalm, as an example, I say to myself, you're exaggerating! Listen to it!

"There shall no evil befall thee - - "

"A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten

thousand at thy right hand, but it shall not come nigh thee - "

"No scourge shall come under your tent - - "

"He'll give his angels charge over you. They will

direct you in all your ways - - "

Imagine this: "You will tread upon the young lion - - you'll
trample the serpent under foot - - "

...so confidently the Psalmist said as he hears the echo of God's voice:

"When he calls upon me I will hear him - -
I will be with him in trouble - - I will
deliver him - - I will rescue him - - with
long life I will satisfy him - - - "

Now that's saying quite a bit. And it's in the Bible at that!

Maybe for the writer of that Psalm it was that way. And that's precisely why he couldn't keep quiet about it -- he became so big-mouthed. And I don't say that disrespectfully. Wherever he went he had to say this kind of thing about God.

Every now and then when you read the Psalms you come across this sort of thing. How about this one: "I have been young and now I am old. Never have I seen the righteous forsaken or his seed going hungry."

...maybe there was a time in the history of the Children of Israel when God had to establish clearly in their minds that He was a good God...and that He was omnipotent -- His power would always work in their behalf. And this, too, we are most certainly intended to believe. We are not to be like Walter de la Mare in one of his poems who talks about the listeners who go from place to place in the great room of Life, knocking on walls and doors and asking the question: "Is there nobody there?" And they get no answer.

We who are believers are given to understand that when we cry out there is Someone who does answer, and whose hand is good, and who smiles upon us graciously.

There was a time in the history of the Jewish people when they were nurtured upon that wonderful doctrine: you obey, and you prosper. Now maybe there's a time when this is the note that has to be struck. And perchance there are some of us who would go stark mad as we face the reality of life if we could not believe it. But even God himself says there must be some kind of balance, and don't you forget it - - that's why you also have in religious literature not only a Psalm which is #91, but you also have something called the Book of Job. And in that Book of Job, God is trying to tell us that it is not always so. Job was a good man, an exemplary man. In fact he was so good that there was no one on the face of the earth quite like him. Let me tell you just in one brief statement how wonderful he actually was....

...he was the kind of man who not only feared God for himself, but had a continued concern that his own children should go on fearing God. And after they got married and moved away, he made it a practice at least once a year to get his sons and their families together, and then he'd ascertain as best he could their spiritual growth and development....that's the kind of a man Job was!

...he was so good that even the Evil One said, "There's no fault in him -- at least that's the report that I had. But let me put him to the test! Because his fortune has been so good -- 'Obey God and prosper' -- let's see if he'll serve God for nothing!" ...well you know the story of Job -- how he was tormented and he was afflicted just because he was good -- a deliberate attempt to test his goodness.

Now back to the text. It's part of the Epistle for today. There was a

man named Peter who had the job of his life trying to convince those early Christians who had stemmed from Jewish stock that just because they believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, they couldn't allow themselves to go on living on the assumption that goodness would be a guarantee of personal safety and security. Maybe it ought to be required reading for everyone who wants to be a Christian, that he might better understand the price of discipleship -- to go back and refresh one's memory of what happened to those early Christians. Maybe you're entitled to be tired of my reminding you of it....

...some of them, just because they believed in Jesus Christ, had their bodies dipped into oil, fastened to poles and props in the Garden of the Gods, and then ignited and made flaming torches.....

...some of them were dragged through the streets behind chariots....

...one of the worst of all methods of torture, as some of them were persecuted, was to take a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ and to tie his body to a post on the opposite side of which was a corpse, so that the man himself would eventually die from putrefaction -- the stench would be that great!

And why? Because they happened to be doing the right thing, the good thing. Oh, they understood the Apostle Peter up to a point. You remember he said, "If you do the wrong thing and you get punished for it -- well, who can't understand that!"..and some of us say 'bravo' -- that's right! If a man does the wrong thing, he ought to be punished -- let him be disciplined in that way.

But then Peter went on to say, "When you do well and you suffer for it, you take it patiently -- this is acceptable to God!"

...let me say it again: Peter says that and you don't like it, and neither do I!

As I saw the congregations gather this morning, and hour after hour I am reacting quite realistically....I pose for myself the question: How many people will be very happy to hear the preacher this morning? You'd much rather have me tell you: Obey God -- and you will prosper!....period. You'd much rather have me tell you: Come to church on Sunday, and everything will be wonderful on Monday...Tuesday...Wednesday...Thursday...Friday...Saturday -- just because you came to church on one Sunday! Well I can't tell you that! And it isn't the Gospel! The Gospel admits that we live in a world where even though a man is trying to do the right thing, he could suffer, and even more, he could suffer because he's trying to do the right thing. So there's Peter's text for you: If when you do well you suffer for it -- face life realistically -- you run the risk of suffering! No one is immune from it.

It may be a mark of maturation to recognize this truth. It's a realistic reading of life. Any pastor who has been in the ministry any length of time doesn't have to go to his files to pull out this name or that name -- he has them right here in the fore-front of his brain, and surely written on the fabric of his heart - - - how so-called good people have had to suffer. And against that background -- downright despicable reprobates who seem to get along very nicely and go scot-free.

Says the Apostle Peter: Accept the fact that you may suffer, and just because you're doing the right thing.

But that isn't all the Apostle Peter said. Christians were never meant to be mere stoics. Christians were meant to live triumphantly, majestically,

magnificently. Says the Apostle Peter: "You take it patiently."

...well now, what does that mean? It means you stand up to it. And by the grace of God you endure -- you lay hold upon it. Someone once said, and wisely so, he might not be able to control the dark hues of life that come upon him, but he could take those varied strains of color and weave them into a magnificent pattern.

..."Take it patiently" says Peter. Because Peter had lived long enough to know the alternative. If you don't take it patiently -- and it's bound to come your way, and you don't take it patiently, what then? You can become sour, embittered....you can dissipate your energies trying to fight back, and to no avail. So what good comes from that? It is of no good to yourself, and surely of no value to other people.

I'm not unmindful of the fact that I'm standing in a Christian pulpit. I do not say it disrespectfully, but once there was a chap, a gallant soul, who was motivated by God Himself to go out into the world and do nothing but to love and to help people....He only had three years in which to do it....and even before those three years were over, just because He was what He was, they crucified Him. He said something one time about, "Isn't there another way out? - - but if there shouldn't be another way out, let me be the obedient one - - " And that is the lot of the Christian: to obey, come wind or weather, poverty or plenty, joy or pain. For man's chief end is to glorify God.

The saints, you see, have become saints because they have suffered. No one has ever become a saint who has not suffered. And I think, if I listen carefully, I can hear them calling back to us: "By the grace of God we endured"and I also hear them saying, I think, something that you might not want me to tell you....." - - and if we had it to do all over again, we would have taken the same route!" Now what will you make of that!

* * * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

Sermon - Pastor Raymond Shaheen
Cantate. The Fourth Sunday After Easter

May 9, 1971

- Festival of the Christian Home

"A SERMON FOR PARENTS"

Through Jesus Christ, Thy Son,
our Lord. Amen.

Our attention is directed on this day to "A Sermon For Parents." The text, if you please, the 6th verse of the 22nd chapter of the Book of Proverbs:

"Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it."

Let me say at once that I cannot possibly find it in my heart to preach a sermon on this day that would fault parents. I myself, as a parent, now as a grandfather, would be the last person in the world to take somebody else to task for any apparent failure in the fulfillment of the role which is given him under God. Likewise as one who has been privileged to serve as a pastor, to sit, as it were, in the confessional booth with men and women who have been trying to do the best they know how, only to discover that every now and then, much to their dismay, they have not succeeded as well as they had hoped or as they had prayed. Nonetheless, the sermon ought to be preached.

And while everything is being said, keep in mind that there is a text -- the text of a very wise man of another generation who said something that we must never forget: you train a child in the way that he should go, and when he is old, he'll not depart from it.

Now let me tell you, that on the occasion of the ordination of your Assistant Pastor, he was given a book, a book, I dare say, that will have in-

creasing value each succeeding year. And I would hope that one day he might have the joy of passing it on to his sons. Significantly enough, it's a book that he will never read, nor in all likelihood will they. It's a book that's written in a strange tongue, the native language of his paternal grandfather. It's the Bible that was given to him once he became a citizen of the United States of America by a good friend. As I stand before you now I have a happy recollection of seeing how my father, every now and then, would read that Bible. And when he would reach for it he would suggest that I go and get a Bible with an English translation....he'd indicate to me just what passages that he wanted read. I would read it, and then he would read it in Arabic. And once he had finished reading, then in his own significant fashion he'd interpret it for us.

The Old Testament characters that impressed my father most were David and Solomon, particularly Solomon.....and as I recall those rare occasions when we would read the Bible together, it was the 3rd chapter of the book of I Kings that had a peculiar fascination for him. Do you by any chance know what that 3rd chapter is? I'm sure you'd be interested. Let me refresh your memory:

. . it's an incident that established very clearly the wisdom of Solomon. There were two women who gave birth to children at about the same time. They lived near each other. One night in her sleep the mother rolled over and suffocated the child. When she became awake, she realized what had happened, and then for some unexplainable impulse, she took the body of her dead child and went over to the bed of the woman with her child,

and she took that woman's child as her own, and placed the dead child alongside of her. When the woman realized that this was not her child, and she couldn't believe that it was dead, the two of them had it out between the two of them....

...then they were brought to Solomon -- "Let the wise man decide who is the real mother." Solomon listened. And then he issued the decree that a sword should be brought to him by one of his servants, and presumably he said, Since you cannot agree among yourselves as to whose child this really is, I will cut the child in two, and I will give to each woman a half....

...one of the women protested vehemently -- far more so than the other. And as you remember the story, without any hesitation whatsoever, the wise Solomon took the baby and put the baby into the hands of that woman. And he said, "You are the real mother, for you want life for this child."

That 3rd chapter of I Kings does more than establish clearly for us the wisdom of Solomon. It also establishes very clearly for us, according to Scripture, the role of a real mother.

The father or the mother, in either case, take it upon themselves to see that life is guaranteed to a child, and that a child is given the right to grow up and to live, and not to die. Perhaps you remember how on occasion, when a child is presented for the Sacrament of Baptism here, like as not the Senior Pastor will say as the child is returned to the arms of the mother, "God smiles upon us in many ways, perhaps never more so than

when He places into our life and into our love the soul of a child...and as long as we live we have no greater responsibility." Of all the people on the face of the earth, no people have greater responsibility for children than those who serve in the role of parents, either as parents, adoptive parents or those who see that the role of parenthood is fulfilled.

Oh, I read what some of you are reading these days, and I put some of it quickly aside when I'm led to understand that in tomorrow's day and the day after tomorrow, the home will not be as you and I have known it, and that there will be other ways of fulfilling the responsibilities of parenthood. Situations may change, but the predicament will always remain the same: How in God's name can a child best grow and develop? And if I take the historical view, I can't see how there can be any alternative, any alteration as far as the good of mankind being served, of the plan that God has in mind from the very beginning - - that a child, in the impressionable years, should be guided and directed by two people in particular as the child might not be directed in any other way by any other people.

I never cease to marvel when I think of the account of the Incarnation, when God was seeing fit to bestow upon us His priceless gift of a Child. What did He do? He found two people, a man named Joseph and a woman named Mary, and He entrusted His precious Child into their keeping. They were the ones more responsible than anyone else for those impressionable years. And as God saw fit to allow that to happen to His Child, His only begotten Son, so it seems to me that the idea remains in the mind of God for our day and for generations yet to come.

What is the role of the parent? To love, of course. To lead, by all means - - to guide, direct, to train. "Train up a child in the way that he

should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it"

...let's be very, very honest with ourselves, and we will find ourselves responding to this Scripture immediately: "but not always!" ...and you are absolutely right! Not every child responds to the way in which he is being directed. But on the other hand, I can quickly say to you that according to scientific data, by pollsters such as Lewis Harris and others, it's being established that 80% of young people do reflect the basic values and ideals and attitudes of their parents....which is simply to say we do get a return. And if perchance the investment is a good one, 80% of the time you get a good return! Take heart, my friend.

Of all the people on the face of the earth who are being badgered a great deal these days, surely parents are coming in for their share of it. We are an ouchy generation. And because we are as ouchy as we are, we're quick to blame anyone....

....youngsters are being blamed by their parents

-- and sometimes unnecessarily

....and parents are being blamed by their youth

-- and sometimes unnecessarily

....parents blame school teachers

-- and sometimes unnecessarily

....and school teachers blame parents

-- and sometimes unnecessarily

....because we're all caught up in the thing, it's so easy to blame one another.

What, now, can I say to you in order to better understand the text:

"Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it" - - what are some of the things that need to be taught in the days of childhood?

- - respect, and reverence for authority. I could never quite understand how we could allow ourselves to become as permissive as we have, particularly when we grew up in a time when practically everyone had the Bible in his home. And would you believe me when I tell you that perhaps there isn't anything that's more authoritarian than Scripture! If you read Scripture correctly, there's very little ground for options and alternatives. As an example, take the Ten Commandments -- where in the world is there anything permissive there? When God Himself thunders in His voice: "This you shall - - and this you shall not! I come down with full weight at this point, because I overheard, through the printed page, what a juror in the Charles Manson case is supposed to have said. He said, "We have been sitting through this thing for 167 days, and all I get out of it now is this: that Charles Manson and three of the women who constitute his 'family' -- when they killed Sharon Tate and the other actresses and the other people involved, in the final analysis all they could say is, 'We did what we did just because we did it.'"

...up in Vermont there's a college, there's a young chap 21 years of age who is a student in that college who has written a book called "An Anarchist's Cookbook"...and in that book he says, "I don't care, whether it's legal or illegal -- I don't care whether it's moral, immoral or amoral. If I feel like doing a thing, I'll do it." And this is the kind of stuff that any number of people are reading in our day.

Don't fault me as being too naive at this point, but may I suggest, can

you imagine Jesus Christ being reared in that way?

...what would have the course of history been had Joseph, in the ruler's house, succumbed to the advances of a woman who felt she had to do her thing and wanted him to respond in like manner?

...what would have been the course of the Old Testament history if Daniel had said, "I'll do what I want to do, without any regard to God's word at all"?

"Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it".....not always. But more times than not. And this is what we must remember. And this is our responsibility.

You know, let me say quite parenthetically -- there's a frightening thing that's come over all of us. We've allowed ourselves to believe, wittingly or unwittingly, that when young people progress to a certain level, before they become adults, that this is everything in life! that youth itself is the apex. And it isn't! We're still on our way! Life continues to be a process of maturation, growth and development. Maybe we have failed those who need it most when we step aside....give up...and don't much care what happens!

I suppose we couldn't all be like the character Job, who even after his sons grew up and got married and established homes of their own, he took it upon himself to check with them periodically, to see how they were doing. He never quite gave up his responsibility of being a parent.

Well, these are the words that I would share with you on this day in particular. What have I really told you? If you can't remember anything else, may I suggest that you try to think of this: 80% isn't a bad record -- it's not bad at all! And most of you achieve it. Take heart! Stick with it!

And for those of you who may know disappointment, I think I can say to you on good authority that nothing good is ever lost. Eventually there is always the return, to some degree at least, of an investment that is properly motivated.

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"TO CLAMBER UP ON GOD'S SEAT"
(Isaiah 6:1)

Grace, mercy and peace from God
our Father and from His Son Jesus
Christ, our Blessed Lord. Amen.

First let me tell you about her. She was sixteen, clear-eyed, intelligent. She was a high school student. She was one of a number of people who had engaged a pastor in conversation because they had just been reading together about the explosion of the first atomic bomb.

Presumably in the course of their conversation with the pastor, someone had quoted the well-known writer of that day who had simply stated: "The atomic age is here to say.....but are we?" Undoubtedly this shook her up quite a bit, and then she turned to the pastor, this eager-eyed, heretofore enthusiastic high school student -- now with a troubled look upon her face, with lines that were somewhat drawn, and with the element of hope not easily discernible.

That's a rather sad thing to experience: a teenager with a face that's characterized by lines sadly drawn, and where the element of hope is scarcely discernible.....and then she said to the pastor, "Tell me, can we believe that there will be any world left twenty years from now?"

Against that, of course, was the article that appeared in a well-known Washington newsletter. The writer had said that war between the East and the West at some point appears to be inevitable -- the conflict is not primarily communistic or ideological. Even if America and Britain should go communistic, war between the East and the West would still be highly probable.

To the best of my knowledge, that writer, also of 25 years ago, has not retracted one sentence that he said. To the best of my knowledge, that woman, rather than that young girl of 16 years of age, now a woman of 41 -- the quarter-of-a-century has passed quickly...and presumably now she is the mother of two or three children, several of whom could well be teenagers...it could well be that she's still asking the question, and her dilemma is double-fold, because now she reads upon the face of her own teenage daughter the same pathetic question: is there any hope in the future?

You see, what we have to recognize is this: that in our day a high percentage of people who are making decisions are those people of 25 years ago, who found the shadow of fear cast upon them. That's why when you ask any number of people today, "How are things going?" - - "Oh, so-so.... ..we're just managing to hold on." - - no great sign of enthusiasm. And then if you were to press the question: "Hold on for what?" - - in all likelihood you'd have to wait quite a while until you got anything that smacked of a meaningful answer. Honestly now, I think this is a fair reading of the times!

...we are not a spirited people, but a dis-spirited people....

...we are not a generation of zest, that's characterized by zest and enthusiasm.....

...we seem to tolerate life, and just go on.

Can you explain it? Can you tell me why this should be so? Even 25 years ago this world was being branded as a mad world. Walter Lippmann, at the zenith of his strength as a writer and columnist and philosopher, was saying that we're caught up in a world where whirl is king. And that gadfly-

of-sorts, George Bernard Shaw, could prick all of us and say that if there should be people on other planets, then it's our world that serves as their insane asylum!

...that's why a song that caught on quite well not long ago was "Stop The World -- I Want To Get Off!"....as much as to say, anything other than this would be better than what we have.

It's a far cry, I submit to you this morning, from the kind of mood in which a young man found himself centuries before Jesus Christ. He looked out upon a world that seemed to lack little hope. Against a world of despair and despondency, he recorded his reaction, and it constitutes the text for today's sermon. It's the 1st verse of the 6th chapter of the prophecy of Isaiah:

"In the year that King Uzziah died I saw
the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and
lifted up . . . "

That redeemed the situation for Isaiah. Round about him on every side was despair, and disillusionment, and defeat....a world that was deteriorating. But in a moment of revelation this man of vision said, "I saw the Lord."

Now I pose for you the question: in a world of similar characteristics, if we were to look up, what might we see? There are those who tell us that we would see nothing but an empty throne, if we saw a throne at all! Now that's the pathetic thing. For there are some people, intelligent people, who honestly believe that no one's in control any more! We've bowed God out of the picture....there is no Mind...there is no Intelligence....there is no driving Force. There are some people who believe that God has abdicated, and if He has not abdicated, then He should! More than one highly sophisticated person has said, "It's high time that we get God out of the

picture and let man on his own take over, and chart a course and determine his future." These are not people who lack intelligence who talk like this!

Now, what can you expect, when we're caught up with voices like this coming from different directions? And particularly when those who are young and in the plastic years, in the college classroom situation, have this kind of thing thrown at them. Or when you and I go and pick up our periodicals and our journals, in highly sophisticated magazines, and this is what we're being told. No wonder we lack spirit. No wonder we are characterized as a people without zest.

When if perchance a man looks up, and if he should see a throne, he sees it empty. Well, when God is bowed out of the picture what then? Who'll take His place? Man's just not accustomed to letting a throne go unoccupied. So! Guess what? Man enthrones himself. Really now, that's what is going on these days -- these maddening days of our self-obsession. Man has pushed God aside. Man has said, "God, move over! Let me be in charge." This is characterized by the new humanism of our day. It's raising its head in different places. Man is capable -- man can do it!

I read with mixed reactions, honestly I did, what President Johnson said. Yesterday, you see, they dedicated the library, a very fine thing. And then he was engaged in conversation and he reacted quite philosophically, and said something like this: that of the thousands upon thousands of words recorded in that library, the message that came through to him as he looked back upon thirty years of history to which he had been related in no insignificant way, he came to the conclusion that as a man stops now and looks over a period of history he comes to these words, only two words: the lesson is that Man can.

Well that's alright up to a point. But it's a sign of maturity for a man to recognize that there are some things he cannot do unaided! For myself, I'm greatly troubled sometimes when I discover what man can do -- a very clever chap, and very intelligent -- it's amazing what we've done. But there are still some things that man cannot do unaided....

...one thing that man was never meant to do, and he was never endowed with the capability, and that is that he was never meant to play God....he was never meant to topple God from His throne....he was never meant to be a pretender to the throne of God. And yet wittingly or unwittingly, that's what man has allowed himself to do.

I frankly confess to you that occasionally in my relationship to you as a pastor, when you and I are left alone and the world is going by, and there is nothing now before us except you and your problem.....I never cease to marvel sometimes when I go away by myself and reflect upon the things that you and I have encountered together -- how so frequently we have bowed God out of the picture, and we have allowed ourselves to believe that by our own boot-straps we could lift ourselves out and could handle any situation without any reference to God whatsoever! What is that except to enthrone man! And then all the while you and I sit there, seemingly helpless. For all the time that we're together, we're talking about our capability, or our lack of it, without any reference to God-who-is-able. Honestly now!

The world has a way of coming in on us, crowding in upon us, clouding our vision. The world needs its Isaiahs. The world needs men who are able to look up and see something over and beyond and above us. It most certainly does!

Do you know the peril of theology in our day? Let me take you into my study now and glance over my shoulder as I read certain journals and as I listen to certain lectures. We have deliberately dragged God down, reduced Him to our level.....which has certain advantages, but which most certainly has disadvantages, because God must never be denied His transcendence. God who can be reduced to my level does not command my respect, and if God is to be God, He must always be held in awe. And this comes to a man only in moments of revelation. Said the young man Isaiah: "I saw the Lord, high and lifted up, seated upon a throne . . "still in control of things. Is your God that big?

James Henry Jowd, a distinguished British preacher, used to tell about visiting a certain parishioner of his who happened to be a shoe repairman. And when he visited the cobbler in his shop, he found it a very small quarter, and he couldn't possibly understand how a man could keep his sanity in a situation like that, confined into a very small area. And he asked the shoe repairman how he was able to keep his sanity. The shoe repairman, without saying a word, got up from his cobbler's bench, walked over to the door, threw it open widely and said, "There's the reason why I keep my sanity!" ...and as the preacher looked out he saw the vastness of the sea beyond the cliff. The cobbler was able to look out, over and above and beyond his own little world.

But that's never enough to say to a Christian. In the last book of the Bible, the Book of Revelation, there was another man who looked up and saw a throne. Imprisoned on the Isle of Patmos, the old man John said, "In the midst of the throne I saw the Lamb, the Lamb of God who had been sacrificed, but now is victorious."

There's a link between this sermon, Ascension Day of last week, and Pentecost, the coming Lord's Day. In the Ascension we recognized the fact that Jesus Christ completed His tenure here on earth triumphantly and is now seated upon the throne in Heaven above at the right hand of God, to make intercession for us. On the day of Pentecost we celebrate the fact that the very spirit and power of God comes to us, enabling us, empowering us, to persevere with patience in the face of a world that's falling apart.

.....so I would say to her, now 41 years of age, she who at 16 asked the question: Will there be any world left?

.....it's the question that can be asked repeatedly. For ours, thanks to man's cleverness, his capability, his ingenuity, remains a world that can be self-destructive - - - except for the power of God that can enable man to take the divine perspective. And therein lies our hope.

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"GREAT DAY!"

MAY THY Holy Spirit so direct
our minds that we may atten-
tively give heed to Thy Word,
even now. Through Jesus Christ,
Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

Was his first name Alexander...was his first name Arthur? - - I can't tell you. Maybe it wasn't either one. But I do know his last name, and I know he was a Britisher, and I know he became a scientist. His last name was Fleming, and I presume the British government so honored him because they recognized what he had done as he discovered a brand new fact that he had never dealt with before. For that man Fleming, in his laboratory, saw fungus-like growth that was new....

...and I presume he began to scratch his head a bit...
put his hand to his chin....and with a puzzled look upon
his face said, "I wonder what it is - - I wonder where
it came from! - - I wonder if it means anything at all - - -"

She's been referred to with reverence and respect as Madame Curie. And one day she looked at something that she didn't quite remember seeing before, or at least it hadn't made an impression upon her -- a kind of energy in a mass of pitchblende.....

...and I presume a bit of scratching of her head as well, and with her hand to her chin, she turned to her husband and said,
"What do you make of it? What do you think this means -- this

new kind of energy at work in this mass of pitchblende?"

...it was only because they paid attention to something new that they had not quite seen before that they went to their laboratory in the old wooden hut, with limited resources and against the scorn of any number of scientists.....and they persevered with patience until they discovered radium.....

So the Curies brought to the world the blessing of radium -- as Fleming brought to the world the blessing of penicillin,

...just because he paid attention to something new, did not dismiss it....and kept probing -- what does it mean? ...what might come of it?

With this kind of an introduction I now plunge head-long into this brief sermon, on Pentecost, Whitsunday. I'm not sure why Whitsunday has gone by the board as far as the calendar of the Church is concerned. There was a day when it had equal strength with Christmas and Easter, and even to this day in England it's a very popular holiday -- not specifically a holy-day. And yet, I am in duty bound to remind you that it was on the day of Pentecost when something brand new and startling was discovered.

Now you need to have the historical setting. Let me give it to you very quickly. The devout Jew always went up to Jerusalem, the holy city, at the time of the festival season. The ordinary population of Jerusalem was about 50,000. But at festival season, ten times that many. They had been there for the feast of the Passover -- you remember that from your religious history -- it was the time when the crucifixion took place, as Christians recall it. Then the devout Jew left. But to his friends and his cousins he probably said, "I'll see you again at the Feast of the Weeks" -- at the time of Pentecost, 49 days later.

So they came back.

Now this time there was a bunch of Christians came back who huddled themselves in a little room. They were cringing with fear -- they were marked people, because they had not given up their belief in Jesus Christ who had been crucified. Every now and then after the crucifixion and the resurrection, He appeared to them and told them certain things, and said now, when He ascended into Heaven, "You stay here in Jerusalem -- don't run away...stay here....and I promise you something, something is going to happen to you." They weren't quite sure exactly what it was, because when your're promised something to happen to you that you've never had happen before, how can you tell what it's going to be if you've never had it before? But at least they were obedient and they stayed there.

And just exactly as Jesus Christ promised, something happened. And it happened on the day of Pentecost, to a bunch of Christians in a little room.

The thing that happened was so tremendous that they were hard-put to explain it or to describe it. Just as when something wonderful happens to you -- you know how poverty-stricken you are with your words and you try to tell it to somebody else....and the more wonderful it is, the more difficult it is to describe. I remember when both of our boys were teenagers, and when one of them as a teenage lad had gone away for a certain event or occasion, I've forgotten just what it was -- but Winifred and I were curious to know what the event was like and what happened. We'd have been very happy, of course, as parents are wont to be, to get a blow-by-blow description of the event or the occasion. But all we got from him was this: -- in the typical jargon of the teenagers several years ago -- "Man, it was a blast!"

...and that's the only thing he could say! -- enthusiastically -- whatever it was had made a terrific impact.

And I suggest to you this morning, with no doubt of reverence whatsoever -- the Day of Pentecost was a blast! -- something explosive had happened, and a tremendous impact had been made upon people. They were hard-put to describe it -- you can read for yourself in the second chapter of the Book of the Acts of the Apostles, how Luke tried to reduce it to words....and he came up with such expressions as "tongues of fire"...."Like a mighty wind"....and people talking, even though they were strangers to one another, in the same tongue.

Well now really, descriptive as that may be, it really doesn't tell you too much about just what did happen. It simply indicates that something extraordinary took place. It was a happening. And like as not, when you deal with a happening, the only thing that you have in your fingers that you can manage is the results. And what were the results on the Day of Pentecost? You had a handful of Christians going out into the world, absolutely unafraid. Heretofore they had been cringing with fear. But now they went out and faced people without any fear whatsoever.

They were so unafraid that because of their commitment to Jesus Christ, when the time came that they would be tortured, put into dungeons, thrown in front of lions, their bodies dipped in oil and ignited as torches....even as they died a terrible death like that, they remained so completely unafraid. When they went out and faced the world, other people looked at them and said, "What does this mean?" They marveled at their behavior because they were always at peace with one another.

Now in order to better appreciate that, I must remind you that up to this

time, in all likelihood they were blaming one another, because they were the bunch who had run out on Jesus Christ. They were His friends -- and when the chips were down, within their company there was one who betrayed, there was one who denied....and every single one forsook Him. And as we are wont to do, you see, when the ship begins to sink, it's the easiest thing in the world to start blaming one another. That's what had happened in their lives for a while. But now -- after the Day of Pentecost, believe you me, they looked at one another -- with kindness -- they had peace among themselves.

Also when they went out and faced the world, they were possessed by joy. They had a certain something down deep inside their hearts that no man could destroy! Honestly, that's exactly what happened on the Day of Pentecost. This is what the people saw, and they reacted in this way, and here's the text for the sermon today, from the Epistle for the day, the second chapter of the Book of the Acts of the Apostles, the 12th and 13th verses:

"And all were amazed and perplexed, saying one to another -- "

(in the manner, I suggest, of that man Fleming...in the manner of that woman Curie)

" -- what does this mean?"

" -- what shall we make of this? This is something new, and this is something startling! We've never seen people like these people!"

Whenever you're confronted by a new and startling fact, you're inclined to react in one of two ways: one is to dismiss it very easily by what you know, by your own prior experience or knowledge. So some of these people who looked at them, so radiant, so lifted up, simply dismissed them by saying,

"They're drunk."

Still there were others who said, "There's something here behind this. What does it mean? How did they really get this way?" Which leads me to ask the question:

- - has anybody ever been so impressed by your peace?

...by your joy? by your ability to face life unafraid?
...that they scratch their head and put their hand to their chin and say,
"I wonder how you get this way? What does it mean, anyway?" It's a good Christian who causes other people to ask about his behavior pattern. Because the good Christian's life is that different -- characterized by peace and joy, by love, and being totally unafraid of anything that might ever happen.

Well it was on the Day of Pentecost that they were visited by the Holy Spirit - - they allowed God to take over. It did happen. And I'm happy to tell you, honestly I am, that every now and then within this congregation I find somebody.....and because I already know the answer, I don't have to put my hand to my chin and have a puzzled look on my face and say, "How do you get this measure of peace? - - how do you allow your life to be ruled by love? - - how can you be made equal to anything that might happen?"

...I say to myself, I know the answer. They have been exposed to God. They've allowed God to take over. It does happen. Thank God that it does!
- - - and that you've had the good fortune to touch people whose lives are that God-possessed. And don't you wish you had it too! Perhaps you do.
And if you do, then let it be even more so!

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

Text: "And all were amazed and perplexed saying to one another, What does this mean? But others mocking said, they are filled with new wine - -"

Acts 2:12-13

It was Hamlet, wasn't it, who said to Horatio, that there are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in our philosophy? And just what did he mean by that? It could be that he was saying new and strangely different things are to be welcomed! We are not to be afraid of what we have not seen before, but rather we are to anticipate the unlikely and when it does occur, to begin at once to probe and to question its meaning. Poor indeed is that man who imprisons himself within his own past experience and knowledge.

"YOUR MOMENT OF TRUTH"

Grace, mercy and peace from God
our Father and from His Son,
Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

He was a stranger-come-to-town. Occasionally when someone came as He came, people ran in from the fields....women left their water-pots at the well....the men walked out from the bazaars, the shop-keepers - - for He was a wandering prophet. In those days prophets were highly regarded and respected.

Not always would He stay very long in one particular spot, but whenever He went anywhere, there were always people who gathered around to hear Him. He would talk with them - - He'd tell them things that they had never thought of before. In reality He would give them unforgettable pictures. And then when He left town the people would come together who happened to have heard Him. And in all likelihood their conversation went something like this:

"You know what? - - He really touched me! - - "

...and if they were using today's jargon, they would have said:

"He turned me on! He talked about God in a way
such as I have never heard anyone else talk about
God. In fact, He made God very real to me."

And if there had been a song-writer in that day, writing such songs as constitute the score for "Natural High" - - in all likelihood one of the number might have said, "Oh God of the stars, the sun and the moon, Oh God of the wind and the sea -- though You're everywhere, how amazing it is that You can be here with me!"that's the way people felt

when they were in the presence of the stranger-come-to-town. He made God so real.

In fact, He made God so real that later on when people thought of Him, they would put their fingers to their lips, and with the utmost of reverence they would name Him as God. That's the way some people reacted to the Stranger.

On the other hand, there were those who talked in this manner:

"He's a radical, that's what he is - - a revolutionary if ever I saw one! I'm not going to allow my children to grow up according to his teaching -- I don't want my kids to be sissies! Do you know what he said when he was in town? -- he said something about loving your enemies! I'm teaching my kids to hate! The Romans occupy our country -- you know how they treat us! You know what they've done with our land! You know how they bleed us for taxation! You know what some of them have done to our women! Love them? - - I hate them! - - "

" - - and then he said something about the meek shall inherit the earth -- do you remember, I heard him with my own ears, say that if somebody would strike you on one cheek, you turn the other cheek! I'm not bringing my youngsters up on talk like that! In fact, if he ever comes our way again, I'll head a committee to deny him entrance into our village. He'll never get another chance to speak here. He's a radical, he's a revolutionary, that's what he is!"

Then there were some people who said,

"Oh, I listened to him for a little while, and then
I remembered that I had things that I had to do
out in the field . . . "

"Oh, yes, I remember -- I listened to him for a little
while, and then I had to get the packages ready for
the order for the next caravan that was leaving town --
and that's a good customer that I have up in Antioch,
and I can't afford to lose him. So I didn't pay too
much attention. He came and he left. I don't really
remember much that he said. He didn't make much dif-
ference in my life . . . "

Well, I think that's the way it might have happened. And if it didn't happen
that way then, then surely that's the way it's happened in succeeding genera-
tions. For wherever Jesus Christ looms upon the horizon, there are people
who react to Him. And that leads me to the text for your sermon:

"And Pilate said, What shall I do now
with Jesus who is called the Christ?"

Pilate is every man, and every man is Pilate, and soon or late I honestly
believe that Jesus Christ arrives on the horizon of every man's life. And as
Jesus Christ comes toward me, I must react.

I react in one of three ways:

- - I take Him seriously, so seriously that I will
call Him Lord and Saviour.....
- - or I will defy Him, and reject Him -- as people
do to this very day.....

- - or there will be those who treat Him with indifference.

They will never allow Him to make a dent on their lives.....

On this solemn occasion and in this sacred place we are gathered to surround a group of young people who most certainly have been exposed to Jesus Christ. There's no question about it! This is what our relationship with them has been all about! - -

...you who saw that they were baptized in their infancy

...you who have taught them in the Sunday School

...you who have been their parents and are their

parents, and guide them in the way of truth and
of love

...a Parish Deaconess....a Pastor.....

- - why have we come into your lives?

In the name of Jesus Christ we have come, and we would earnestly hope and pray that as long as you live, whenever you think of us, you may associate us with the Lord and Giver of Life, even Jesus Christ.

What shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ? - - you may remember when we first met and began our final year of catechetical instruction together, you may remember in the moments that we had at Bethany in the personal interviews that the Assistant Pastor and I shared with you -- we said the decision has to be made -- it's your decision. You've made it. And in the making of that decision you have made our hearts glad, and cause even the very angels in Heaven to rejoice. For you must never forget that as we come here you are surrounded not only by those who are present now, but as the Assistant Pastor indicated in one of his prayers today, that we are surrounded by those, the ranks of the redeemed in Heaven above. And I think I can tell you on good authority, as their voices come to those of us who pray, that they are saying to us, "You have made

the right decision!"

As the future unfolds, there are only two alternatives given to any man by which he reacts to what has happened.....as the future unfolds, there are only two alternatives open to any man as he looks back to what has happened - - -

- - he either says, "I'm glad I did!"

- - or he says, "I wish I had!"

Your moment of truth has arrived. And you have proven yourselves worthy.

"The moment of truth is here for you,
This moment will never come again.
I know the One who can make life begin,
You, too, can know Him, my friend.

He'll help you get it all together
If your life is falling all apart.
Here's the chance of a lifetime for you,
He'll give your life a new start.

If your life is a puzzle to you,
The pieces won't fall into place.
I know the One who can fit them together,
Come now and meet Him face to face.

The moment of truth is here for you,
This moment may never come again.
Jesus, the One who will make your life new
Is here in this moment of truth,
Your moment of truth."

(Sermon concluded with the cast of "Natural High" singing the above number from that production as they faced the members of the Confirmation Class)

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"GOD OF THE FORWARD LOOK"

Grace, mercy and peace from God
our Father and from his Son,
Jesus Christ, our Blessed Lord.
Amen.

You might as well know it, if you haven't found it out for yourself already, that an occupational hazard of the ministry is that preachers are always prone to give advice, to offer suggestions. At the risk of succumbing to that temptation, let me give you two suggestions.

One is: it seems to me that anybody who lives in a metropolitan area ought to so discipline his life that at least once each year he gets himself back to the hinterland somewhere, he goes to some community that perchance has 300 people, 3,000 people.....maybe 8 - 10,000 people. And he allows himself to feel the flow of life in a community of that type.

Now my second suggestion: for any man, any woman forty years of age and over, to make it a point, at least once a year, to attend some high school graduation ceremony, and far better still, if you can combine the two, and attend a high school ceremony in a community that has no more than 5 - 8 - 10,000 people.

Twice now within the past eight years I've had the good fortune to return to my high school alma mater and to deliver the commencement address. I went back this past week. It's a community now, perhaps 5 - 6 - 7,000 people -- it's

overshadowed by Greater Williamsport with its 40,000 people. It was quite an occasion! The auditorium, as you might surmise, was filled with the proud and pleased parents. And on the stage, some 200 and more graduates.

Three of the class had been chosen to deliver addresses. One gal, perfectly charming, was the lead-off one. Her address was simply titled "Objectives"....and she told us certain things that now she saw as she looked out upon a world waiting -- for them!

-- the second address, equally delivered with capability, was entitled "Opportunities" -- now that's a very refreshing thing, to have someone as young as that look out upon a world and see opportunities....

-- the third address, equally capable and realistic, was entitled, "On Facing Our Problems" -- for as they looked upon the opportunities they also recognized that they would be faced with problem areas.

When it came time for me to speak, I told the audience that I would have served them well if I simply would have said, "You've already heard enough tonight to hold you in good stead -- ".....for what those three graduates had told the people who were present was absolutely salutary. It is a sign of maturity when a person can look out and see something and articulate it, and define his objectives wisely and well...For there are many people who look out upon life and never see anything -- -- and then to be able to see what you've seen and call it an opportunity, even though it poses a problem. For it is, too, a mark of maturity, isn't it, a growing up, to realize that in life you simply exchange one set of problems for another. And happy indeed is any man who looks upon any problem as an opportunity.

But upon further reflection as we drove back that night, it occurred to

me that all of those graduates were people with the forward look. None of them, as I talked with them, would want to go back to what had been! In fact, for twelve years they had been pushing toward this moment -- they had been looking ahead even then. And I also sensed that none of them wanted to stay exactly in the plateau which they had reached. The gist of the comments that I heard: "What's next? = what lies ahead?"

I thought to myself, this is what the Christian religion is always telling us -- "What's next? - - face the future! - - forge forward!"

You see, there is always the temptation for some people, after they reach a certain age, to look back to the past. Now there's nothing wrong with that as such. We learn from the past, and foolish indeed is any man who has never mastered historical perspective. It's in and through the past that you and I have a foundation so essential to life. But when a man looks back to the past, he must be careful lest he allows himself to become imprisoned in the past. And that's one thing a past was never meant for.

There are some folks who, when they reach a plateau and are confronted by the present moment, that they're quite unsettled by it -- it can be so demanding and so exacting! And they never quite properly regard the present.

But to think of the future is always a salutary thing. Charles Kettering very properly said, "I have a great interest in the future, because I expect to spend the rest of my life in it!"

Now there's a text for this sermon. It's from the 90th Psalm:

"For all our days pass away - - "

I'm not so sure that I like the text. I know one thing, that I never dwell

on it very long. Oh, it's a true statement, alright, but it's not a fair one. I remember, when I began my ministry, one of the first funerals that I was called upon to conduct, as I made arrangements with the family, an old lady said to me, "Now listen here, young man -- if you're around to conduct my funeral service, there's one passage of Scripture that you don't read -- do you hear me!" she said, "It's that 90th Psalm."for in that 90th Psalm we talk about grass that grows up in the morning and then at nighttime it withers and dies -- like something you throw into a bake-oven....in that 90th Psalm we simply talk about days that pass away. And bless her soul, she knew there was more to life than simply having one day pass into another!

...but you and I must be on our guard, lest we succumb in our day to a philosophy that so glues itself upon the present ~~that~~ all that we can see is that one day is simply passed away, and not much leading to anywhere in particular.

I think there are moments when I can understand why age can lead to cynicism and despair, especially if we have been battered and bumped around a bit, but I'm always saddened to discover that occasionally there are those young people who have become cynical. And if I were to fault some people who belong to the day's younger generation, I think I'd have to admit that they grieve me most in this direction, that they have become cynical, and there are some folks who have lost their zest - - - not like those high school graduates there in the hinterland....but within the inner city and on the fringe of metropolitan areas, they have become cynical.

I do my best, within my limitations, to try to understand what some of the folk singers of today are saying. I'm quite taken by their poignancy.

But sometimes I feel as though I have to jump up from my seat and say, "You're not telling the whole story!" Listen now as I read for you certain lines by Simon and Garfunkel entitled "Leaves That Are Green Turn To Brown":

"I was 21 years when I wrote this song.
I'm 22 now, but I won't be for long.
Time breathes on and the leaves that are green turn to brown.
And they wither with the wind and they crumble in your hand.
I threw a pebble in the brook and watched the ripples run away
And they never made a sound.
And the leaves that are green turn to brown.
And they wither with the wind and they crumble in your hand.
Hello Goodbye. That's all there is.
And the leaves that are green turn to brown."

...it's a true statement. But it's not a fair reading of life. For you simply haven't told the whole story when you say that the leaves turn to brown. KRUHM-STOCK came to a fitting close last night, with the worship period. The worship leader spoke to my need. If you were not there, try to picture it with me now, on that gentle slope we faced the west...and just beyond us, fringed by green, there was a natural screen that shut out the rest of the world. And then the worship leader read for us that magnificent chapter in the Bible that deals with Creation, about God creating the world, and how you and I who were there were sharing in that created beauty in that present moment....it was lush round about us on every side....absolutely verdant...

...and then I mused to myself as I remembered that I don't know when I've looked forward to a Spring as much as I did this year. Not that the winter was unusually hard, but I've thoroughly enjoyed this year's Spring. Oh, I know full well that Santayana the philosopher has said, it is better to develop an interest in the changing seasons than to fall hopelessly in love with Spring....

...nonetheless, sad indeed is that man who doesn't look forward to Spring.

Must I remind you that God and His creative hand has never missed a Spring yet! Must I remind you that God, in His grace, has given us one brand new day after another -- He's never missed a sunrise yet! Whatever else God is, He's always the God of the future, God of the tomorrow....God-of-the-forward-look.....and happy indeed is that man who gears his life to the prospect of another day, and prepares, in the present moment, for the future.

A man really lives, not by his past, but by his tomorrow, the thing which he anticipates. For what we anticipate and what we desire, we become. And with all the ardor of my soul I would remind you that that is the gist of the Christian faith. The Creator is always talking about life, not about death. The Christian philosophy is not about green leaves that turn to brown, and that crumble in your hand. The Christian philosophy deals with the Springtime that always follows winter!

....of the sunrise that follows the sunset.....

For the Christian, days do pass away, but they're meant to pass away into something better. I dare you to believe it!

* * * *

"THROUGH LIFE'S CHANGING PATTERN"

TO THE end, O God, that we might
better understand Thy sacred truth,
give us Your blessing now, make us
receptive to what we hear, that we
might become Your obedient servants.
Through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our
Lord. Amen.

The man who wrote the Epistle that's called Second Peter surely took seriously what he heard. Someone must have reported to him, as he had not found it out for himself, that a number of people who called themselves Christians were becoming quite distraught and disillusioned. You see, for some time they had lived in the hope that their Blessed Lord would re-appear. If there had not been in their own number those who were present when Jesus Christ ascended into Heaven, at least they had gotten the report that when He disappeared from their sight the voice had been told to them that "This same Jesus that you see going up into Heaven will come again in like manner." And they lived out the days of their years -- no Jesus Christ appeared on the horizon.

Now as over against that, the word had also gotten around that the world was going to come to an end. They knew their Bible history well enough to understand that in an earlier period God had visited wrath upon the earth and had destroyed it by water. Now the children of this world had become so wicked, they were given to understand that the world was going to be dissolved by fire. This really shook them up quite a bit, and the writer of Second Peter knew all

about it. And he felt that he ought to speak to them about it. And that's one reason why you have the letter that bears his name.

Now what do you suppose he talked about when he spoke to a group of people who were suffering from this disaffection, to a degree, and this disenchantment -- when he gave them to understand that maybe they shouldn't worry too much about the world coming to an end. The thing they really ought to concern themselves with was the way they were living -- "What kind of persons ought we to be?" -- that's the thing, he said, that you ought to worry about!

Well, here's the text for this sermon today....it's Second Peter, the 3rd chapter, the 11 - 13 verses:

"Since all these things are thus to be dissolved,
what sort of person ought we to be?"

...alright, let's go on the assumption that Jesus Christ, who said He was going to come back, hasn't come yet. And granted you're sick and tired of waiting, what are you going to do about it? In the meantime, how are you going to live -- what kind of person are you going to be? Alright, admit that there's some element of truth that the world is going to be destroyed -- in the face of that, how are you going to live today? What kind of person are you going to be?

The preacher and the writer of the Epistle realized full well that they were dealing with an element of futility. If promises are not being fulfilled, if the blessed hope is being unrealized, and if this world of which we are so much part and to which we are clinging is going to be destroyed -- what's the use?

Of all the common cries that a man might hear today, none perhaps is heard more often - - what's the use? Everything seems to be so futile. I never cease to marvel, as your Pastor, to recognize how much of the trauma which is life takes place within this congregation from Sunday to Sunday. And yet I ought not to marvel at that because we do constitute a people of about three thousand in total number - - that's about the size of the total population of that small town that some of us talk about, in which some of you were reared - - that home-town that still has its hold upon us -- to which some day you might like to retire. And as you look back now and think of life in that home-town years ago, no matter how tranquil and peaceful it seemed, the routine was frequently broken by the unexpected and the unfortunate....the terrible and untoward seemed to break loose, every now and then. What was peaceful and what was tranquil was broken, and the whole community was shaken up. If any man ever allowed himself to believe that there was some degree of permanence to what he had, life was always teaching us that it could be taken away.

From my vantage-point as your Pastor I could relate for you one chapter after another that takes place within our own community known as Saint Luke Church.....and what dramatic chapters are being written. I am thinking particularly of him and her...

...she was here last Sunday...sat about four pews from the front of the left-hand side - - not a member of this congregation, but he is....and she thoroughly enjoyed coming to worship in this place. She looked forward to whenever she could come.

I could give you some details....four years ago she had a crippling stroke. He had a very important position...he quit his job in order to stay home and to minister to her needs with compassion. She responded beautifully. They were good years. Last month they went to Florida....purchased a condominium...she met with the interior decorator...they arranged to have all the decisions made. Then they came back north, in the happy prospect of living there and thoroughly enjoying it. Last Sunday, as their custom was, they came to church. She enjoyed the singing of the hymns -- you remember how well we sang those two hymns in particular last Sunday? -- she went home. Shortly after she crossed the threshold she suffered a massive stroke from which she never recovered. She was laid to rest this past week.

He said to me as we stood together Thursday night -- "We were right at the pinnacle, Pastor -- "...but the world has crumbled -- ah, that wasn't his word, it's mine! -- because he said triumphantly, "I have no regrets. They were good years"...and I know he gave them his best.

But you see the story is this: just within grasp, it's taken away, it's dissolved, it's gone. And it happens again and again and again. And the spectrum in which it happens is wide. It just doesn't happen to those who come to retirement age....

...it happens to the chap, you see, who's been pushing and driving -- that promotion that he's coveted is just within grasp, and then comes an economical recession, the consolidation of staff, and he's let go. There's a limit to the field in which he can work, and the world begins to crumple and dissolve.....

...but it was just within grasp! ...it was almost there!

Oh, the spectrum is wide. Not simply retirement age, middle age, at the prime of one's career - - it's also at the other end of the spectrum.

...as I told you last Sunday, I try to listen as carefully as I can to what my younger friends are saying to us. I listened to at least one of two of them that I confirmed in the Christian Faith since I have been here with you. They're out on the West Coast now. They're experimenting with another kind of life, so alien to the kind of life that you and I cherish and embrace. Some people say they're opting out - - some people say they're turning their back upon some of the things that you and I have held dear, because even at their age, before they reach 40 and 50 and 60, they're saying, "What's the use? - - you're not going to catch me with an ulcer....you're not going to catch me sacrificing my life for an institution or an establishment."

...what's the use? There's a world over the horizon, and one reaches for it. It's illusive. But who is there among us who can't possibly understand the tenor of these remarks?

You see, it's nothing new for us. It is almost as old as thinking man, because man has always thought in terms of his tomorrows - - when they escape his grasp, if his world should crumble, he may succumb to futility, if not to frustration and fear.

Does the Christian Church have anything to say against the background of life as real as that? So I turn you again to the writer of the Epistle called Second Peter. Assume then, that your world will crumble...assume then, that

you have no guarantee that you can grasp anything - - the question is this: not, when is it going to happen? The question is: What kind of a person will you become in the face of something as terrible as that?

He went on to answer the question, of course he did. And he said: for the Christian, he has no alternative, he's meant to go on day by day, loving and serving his God - - - he's meant to go on day by day to live as a child of God, come wind or weather - - to do the things that are pleasing in God's sight.

I remember that bold chap, a member of my student generation, who went to the highly esteemed professor and he said, "I honestly believe the world is going to come to an end".....and my highly regarded professor friend simply turned to him and said, "Very well, maybe you'll begin now to learn how you can live without it!"

Stephen Neill, Englishman, came and visited the United States a few years ago....a very perceptive chap, he wanted to put his finger as best he could upon the spiritual pulsebeat of Western civilization and the cultural experience as we know it on this continent. He went back home and wrote a book. He was much impressed with many things that he saw and experienced. But he came to an unfortunate conclusion: he believed that we were a people bewildered and confused, who never quite knew what we ought to do or how we ought to behave. And he said, the reason for this is that the all-important God-factor has been removed from our life. You see, the God-factor introduces the eternal dimension, and the eternal dimension always has to deal with something which is over and above and beyond this present world. The truth of the matter is that this is not God's only world. The world of time is not the only thing in which God has an interest. The fact that you and I should live out the days of

our years, a limited chapter in time, is not the only thing in which God is interested. God has greater concern than just the days and the years that you and I live out.....

...that's why the church is always reminding people of the eternal dimension

...that's why the church always talks in terms of life eternal

...that's why the church is always talking in terms of the God who will come again

James Moffett, the great Biblical scholar, is absolutely right when he implies that ^{as soon as} ~~since~~ men eliminate the eternal dimension, their morality and their ethics begin to deteriorate. The man who has something to die for has something to live for. The man who doesn't see anything beyond the end of his earthly pilgrimage runs the risk of living a life without significance and without substance.

What is the church trying to tell us? We are the children of God. God is our Heavenly Father. There is the yearning and the craving after things eternal that remains within the soul of man which crowns him with dignity and honor and purpose....

...said God's Son, our Blessed Lord, "I will never leave you,

I will never forsake you, I will see you again. . "

...said Jesus Christ, God's Son, our Blessed Lord, "In my Father's house there is more than one room!"

So for those of us who live in this present age, where we're absolutely uncertain as to what tomorrow might bring, the only thing that guarantees any measure of sane behavior is to go on living day by day as God's good children. Otherwise the world just wouldn't be a fit place in which to live. It's because there are those who believe this that some of us want to go on living, even toward an uncertain end.

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"WHO MAKE MISTAKES"

O GOD, Cleanse us by Your grace, that
our noble intention would remain to
give heed to Your Word, even now as
we wait in this holy place. Through
Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

I wrote the greater part of this sermon by hand, using a ball point pen. I much prefer to write by hand rather than a typewriter. The typewriter, however, like the ball point pen, suffers a disadvantage from the lead pencil with an eraser, in so much common use a few decades ago. Do you remember it? -- with a lead pencil in hand, the gum or rubber tip eraser at the other end, and you sat down to write. That rubber-tip eraser was a constant reminder that you might make a mistake, and so you did! And you turned the pencil around, and feverishly then, you began to rub...and there the smear remained on the paper. But the correction of a mistake was attempted. Every time a man picked up a lead pencil with a rubber eraser at the other end, he had a constant reminder that he might make a mistake.

That's a good basic tenet to keep in mind as you journey through life. For as you and I go through life there is always the possibility of making a mistake. Parents do well to remember this as they rear their children -- this is part of the risk of growing up -- always the likelihood of making a mistake.

A wise and a good school teacher does well to keep this in mind as he deals with his pupils -- there is always the possibility that you will make a mistake. Fortunate indeed is the set of parents who have youngsters who somewhere along the line will recognize the fact that maybe their parents make mis-

takes, too, and then deal with them with charity. For all of us are as children in God's sight, and none of us ever reaches the point where he is completely beyond making a mistake.

Now all of this leads me to read the text for this sermon. It's the first verse of the 15th chapter of the Gospel according to Luke -- it was read as the Gospel for today. Incidentally, the 1st verse, which serves as the text for this sermon, is the introductory verse for a series of three stories told by Jesus Christ. This is the text:

"Then drew near unto him all the publicans
and sinners, to hear him."

Why did they flock to Him -- carpenter's-son-turned-preacher? -- but more important, what was it that they heard when they turned to Him? If you know what it is that they heard when they turned to Him, you'll in all likelihood have the answer as to why they turned to Him.

Would you be willing to accept the suggestion that they were people who had made mistakes in life? Let's begin with the publicans. You've heard me tell you repeatedly, as I've referred to them, they were the tax collectors in that day. They were carefully chosen by the occupying forces. In this case Rome said, we need you to collect taxes in this particular province....

...and then they had a peculiar arrangement, if I remember what I've read correctly -- Rome would say to the tax collector, "You return to us so much, but over, above and beyond this that you get, you can keep for yourself!"

There is always the temptation in human nature to bleed people, to exploit, to take advantage of them. And these tax collectors were not beyond that.

They were in the wrong job, in the eyes of their fellow people, and they

were going about it in the wrong way:

" - - then drew near to him all the tax
collectors, and the sinners - - "

...lump them together in one expression, they were people who had made a mis-
take....

...either in their unwisdom...

...either in their stupidity or their folly, or their wickedness...

...wittingly or unwittingly, deliberately or otherwise...

....they had done the wrong thing. Now they were hurt by it, and life itself was hurting them because that's the way life has a way of treating people who make mistakes. The diabolical nature of man permeates all society, and we have a way, in our society, of hurting people who have made mistakes.

I'm not talking now about the kind of punishment that for society's sake has to be exacted. I'm talking now about the kind of behavior on our part that down-grades those who are unfortunate enough to have had an error in judgment or behavior. Well the text says people like that flocked to hear Jesus Christ. They responded to His charismatic appeal. And if I understand the mind and spirit of Jesus Christ at all, I think I can see Him coming to them, giving them to understand that He knew their situation -- He understood the error of their ways -- He knew full well what they had done, why they had done it the way they did. And He also read life so realistically that He knew they were being hurt by it.....they were afraid to live....they were cringing in fear. They had made a mistake - - and what assurance do they have that they wouldn't make another mistake?

As the Pastor who has been privileged to serve people for three decades, I spend a reasonable amount of my time in counseling with people who at 40 -

50 - 60 years of age are irritated by the emotional scars that remain from mistakes that were made years earlier. They simply did the wrong thing, or they were exposed to the wrong persons...

...there are some youngsters who go to the wrong school

...there are some youngsters who go to the right school, and

they're taught by the wrong teacher

...there are some youngsters who leave home and go to the right

town, but they associate with the wrong people

...there are some people who get into the wrong profession

...there are some people who marry the wrong person...

...and then they go on through life, whatever the wrong thing is that's happened, and they limp, and they cringe in fear. They remain constantly haunted by the mistakes of the past, and that makes them deathly afraid of the future.

And then one day they are encountered by Jesus Christ. That series of three stories that He tells constituting the 15th chapter of the Gospel according to Luke give us the unforgettable picture of a God who comes to us where we are -- in our fallenness -- in our stupidity -- in our wickedness....and says to us, we don't have to stay there....who says to us, we don't have to go on inching toward Hell, or going head-long in the direction of Hell.....we don't have to continue as we have. This is decidedly God's message come to us in Jesus Christ. That's why we call Him Redeemer - - Saviour.

Not so Albert Camus, however. In his "The Fall", as some of you may remember, the central character is a Parisian lawyer. He is walking home. He's walking along the River Seine. He's about to cross one of the bridges, and as he does so, he thinks he hears -- yes, he does!-- the sound of a body falling

into the river....and then there comes the shrieking voice of a woman.

...he stands immobilized, but he does nothing more than that.

He does not go to her rescue, he doesn't go to look for help.

After a while he goes home, walking in the rain. For days he will not allow himself to read the papers, nor does he tell anyone about what had happened.

Years later he is haunted by the fact that what had happened had happened.

This is his fall.....and Albert Camus has his central character, the Parisian lawyer, crying out, "Oh young woman, come back again -- jump into the river a second time and give me another chance to save both you and myself!"

...but Albert Camus says, it will not happen again. It is too late.

In the eyes of God it is never too late. God is always coming back to us again and again and again. God is always giving us a chance to see the situation redeemed, and ourselves above all else. That's why they came to hear Him - - no one had ever spoken to them like that before....

" - - then drew near unto him all the
tax collectors and the sinners, to
hear him - - "

If I did not believe this, I would turn in my ordination papers tomorrow. If I did not believe this, I would never again want to preach another sermon. This is the Christian Gospel - - that God has come to us in Jesus Christ.....
..speaking the good word...

- - you are salvageable! -- you can be redeemed!

- - you don't have to stay as you are!

- - you were not meant to go to Hell!

There are several ways of dealing with people who make mistakes. I suppose one way, when the mistake has been discovered, to rebuke the person, and to

punish him.

Another way perhaps is to say to the person, Alright, you've made a mistake - - I think I understand how it happened, but we won't let it happen again...

...and in saying that, it's the intention of the person who has spoken to never again give the person another chance. There are people who have been treated like that - - one mistake, and brother! you've had it! You'll never get another chance.

Not so John Craik.....

...I hope that we might have the opportunity to visit his monument. Early in July Mrs. Shaheen and I will be leaving, thanks to your kindness and your generosity, for a four-week's sojourn in England, fulfilling, for me at least, a life-long dream, just to leisurely cover the English countryside.....

Hopefully we'll spend some time visiting the village church, steeping ourselves in history in the church yard. I'm not sure whether it's on our itinerary or not -- I certainly hope that it is -- Dumfries. Because there in the church yard at Dumfries is a monument to John Craik.

Now who was John Craik? Well, a hundred years ago he was the writing-master, the teacher of penmanship in the Dumfries Academy. He was gifted and skilled and had a wonderful reputation. Now he represents another way of handling mistakes.....

...can't you picture him walking up and down the aisle of his class-room, looking over the shoulders of the boys as they had their pen in hand and were writing in their copy book.....and

occasionally he'd come across a youngster who inadvertently had a blot on his page, from the ink-well, or perhaps a series of awkward lines -- he just couldn't quite get the pen to go as artistically as he would like to have had it go.....instead of John Craik bawling out the youngster, we're told he would sit right down alongside of the youngster, take in his own hand the pen of the youngster, and then very carefully he would transform the blot on the page into something perfectly beautiful.....he'd take those awkward lines and paint a lovely picture. They even said that his specialty was to transform ugly blots into pictures of angels!.....

I'd like to think, and I believe I have it on good authority as I read the New Testament, that that's exactly what Jesus Christ does with our lives. He comes to us, and on this copy-book of our life, so readily evident with blotches and ugly and awkward lines, with His own master stroke He brings a touch of beauty and of strength.

Up in the hills of home we have a man who used to repair antiques. He would say to somebody who would bring him a particular item of furniture, "I can guarantee that once this broken antique leaves my shop, since you brought it to me to be restored, I can assure you that it will be better and stronger than when you first got it." The Christian understanding of the repentant sinner who receives the redeeming grace of God is that the restorative touch leaves him better.

It was the Apostle Paul who said, "All things work together for good to those who love the Lord.....and that includes the transforming touch of Jesus Christ...When our lives are broken and battered and bruised. As God gives me

strength, this is the Gospel I would proclaim. And whenever that day should come when I would no longer be your Pastor, I would hope that you would look upon me as a man who tried to be patient with you, in your mistakes, in your time of sinning...

....just as I would always want to remember you as the people who were patient and kind and considerate of all my frailty and wickedness.

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

A NATION UNDER GOD

THROUGH JESUS CHRIST, Thy Son,
our Lord. Amen.

Just how it came about, who it was who chose him, I can't quite tell you. I only know that back there in December, 1777, a preacher man by the name of the Rev. J. Dushay sat down and composed a prayer. Now it wasn't the first prayer that he'd ever composed, and surely he wasn't the only man in that day who went about writing a prayer to be offered in public. But there was something different about this prayer - - the difference is that it was the first prayer ever to be offered in the American Congress.

It was something less than 300 words in length....the tone of the prayer presumably much like any other prayer that has been offered in succeeding years before a Congressional body.....such expressions as: "Look in mercy upon the American States"....."support our cause"...."give us wisdom"...."let the enemy know how wrong they are"..... Well, let me read the prayer for you, and then you yourself can be something of a judge as to its sense, and its substance:

"O LORD, Our Heavenly Father, High and Mighty King of kings, Lord of lords, Who dost from Thy Throne behold all the dwellers on earth and reignest with power supreme and uncontrolled over all the kingdoms, the empires and the governments; Look down in mercy, we beseech Thee, on these American States, who have fled to Thee from the rod of the oppressor and thrown themselves on Thy gracious protection, desiring henceforth to be dependent only on Thee.

"To Thee they have appealed for the righteousness of their cause; to Thee they now look up for that countenance and support which You alone can give. Take them, therefore, Heavenly Father, under Thy nurturing care. Give them wisdom and counsel, and valour in the field. Defeat the malicious designs of our cruel adversaries; convince them of the unrightness of their cause. and if they persist in sanguinary purpose, O let the voice of Thine own unerring justice, sounding in their hearts, constrain them to drop the weapons of war from their unnerved hands in the day of battle.

"By Thy presence, O God of Wisdom, and through the counsels of this honorable assembly, enable them to settle things on the best and surest foundation, that the scene of blood may be speedily closed, that order, harmony and peace may be effectually restored, and truth, justice, religion and piety prevail and flourish among Thy people.

"Preserve the health of the bodies and vigour of their minds. Shower down on them and the millions they here represent such temporal blessings as Thou seest expedient for them in this world. Crown them with the everlasting glory in the world to come. All of this we ask in the name and through the merits of Jesus Christ, our Saviour. Amen."

So. There you have a patriot and a God-fearing chap all rolled up in one, a preacher holding in his hand, as it would seem, in one hand a Bible, and holding in the other hand an American flag....first cousin, one might say, symbolically speaking, to that Lutheran preacher, Peter Muhlenberg, who in that Virginia country-side pulpit not too many miles distant from where we are right now, who wore both a preacher's gown and a Regimental uniform, as he stood at the pulpit one Lord's Day. And when he had to make the choice as to which one he was going to discard, he didn't hesitate as he put aside the preacher's robe and marched off in his Regimental uniform to do battle. It was a day, you see, when patriotic fervor ran high.

There are those who tell us: not so today. David Reisman is of the opinion that patriotic fervor is on the decline -- and there are some of you who might be able to give evidence of this fact -- that no longer do people have the same respect and regard for their country as once they did, that there are those who no longer find themselves stirred to the depth of their hearts when the National Anthem is sung or the flag unfurled. There was a day, they tell me, when in many school systems, the teacher began by having ten verses of the Bible read without comment, the praying of the Lord's Prayer, the salute to the flag. But where is that done today? There are those who tell us that patriotic fervor is on the decline.

On the other hand, there are those who are trying to build a case and tell us that there's increasing in its tempo. As an example, the American flag is more on display. People proudly wear it on their lapel as a button ...it's implanted on car windows by means of a decal....there are even some women, when they add to their wardrobe, will choose an outfit -- red, white, blue.

Maybe the case is not so much as to whether one can prove if patriotic fervor is on the increase or the decline -- maybe the point that has to be made: there must be a sense of balance, and that it is right and proper for a person to think highly of his native land. I'd even go one step farther, and with all the ardor of my soul, as one who stands at the sacred desk, to maintain in your presence, on this solemn and holy occasion, that it's not simply a right but also a duty for a man to ask God's blessing upon his country.

Now the text for this sermon:

"God be merciful unto us, and bless us;
and cause his face to shine upon us;
That thy way may be known upon earth,
thy saving health among all nations.

...Scripture for it, if you please: there was a nation, and there was a people who honestly believed that in the sight of God they had a right to fall upon their knees and a duty to ask God to smile favorably upon them.

We haven't been doing enough of this in recent years. We've found it a very easy thing to criticize the leaders of our land...we've found it an easy thing to hold some of them in scorn and contempt. Perhaps a man could prove a point that there and there men and women in high places have proven the frailty of human nature, been faulty in their judgment. And if the Dean of the Washington Cathedral wants to maintain as he did last Sunday as he preached from the Cathedral, that the men who are his friends -- (my appraisal for it now) -- were victimized by their error in judgment because of their arrogance and thinking that they could take the part of God.

That's rather bold thinking. It's rather a very daring judgment to make. Make of it what you will, but each of us is sobered by the fact that the nation is made up of people, people much as we are, and they're not entirely free of the frailty of human nature. There is always the possibility to err. And because this is true, I submit to you, it isn't simply a right, but also a duty that we ought to perform, by which we pray for our nation and our leaders.

If I wanted to, I could take you to task, as you might well give me the responsibility, and ask you how many times a week, how many times a day, do you ask God to give wisdom to those who have positions of responsibility, making decisions that affect not only us but all mankind. And until you and I lift

them up in the arms of our prayers, what right have we to condemn?

Far be it from one preacher to criticize another preacher, especially when he prays . . .

...let me preface my remark by saying I'm delighted that the Rev. John Dushay was asked to offer that prayer back there in 1777 -- I'm delighted that the practice continues even to this day, that prayer should be offered in Congress.....

. . but with something of a discerning eye, the prayer is not a complete prayer. It's a good prayer, but it does not go far enough - - just as you and I don't go far enough if we read only one verse for this text. We do ourselves an injustice to Scripture and an injustice to our Lord if you read only verse 1 of Psalm 67. I'll read only one verse for you, deliberately, that you might see the contrast:

"God be merciful unto us, and bless us,
and cause his face to shine upon us;. . . "

...that's a good prayer. And the prayer that the Rev. J. Dushay offered in Congress December, 1777, is also a good prayer because it's in keeping with this sentiment. But the prayer does not go far enough, because there's a second verse to the 67th Psalm that needs to be read, even as the first verse ends with a semi-colon - - "God be merciful unto us, and bless us, and cause his face to shine upon us;

That thy way may be known upon earth,
thy saving health among all nations."

...THAT'S THE HIGHER KIND OF PATRIOTISM. That's the kind of patriotism that God

can bless. Stephen Decatur, you know, used to say, "My country, in her intercourse with foreign nations, may she always be right, but my country, right or wrong." Even Cicero, who was a pagan philosopher, in one of his writings maintained that there are some things that a man would never stoop to do, even in defense of his country, because the deed in itself would be an immoral thing.

Thomas Aquinas, great writer in the church, maintained that men and women ought to look upon their country in much the same way as we are taught to interpret the Fourth Commandment, "Honor thy father and thy mother" -- that one's native land is also a fatherland through which much good has come into his life, and to whom he remains a debtor as long as he lives.

I am the son of an immigrant pedlar. I wish it were possible for me to share with you the enthusiasm and the respect which my father continued to have even to the day he died for his adopted land -- this wonderful America, and it brought so much into his life, and that would offer so much to his children and to their children. Thomas Aquinas was absolutely right that a man ought to look upon his native land or his fatherland or the country in which he lives as the provider and the protector.

One has a perfect right, then, one has a duty to pray: "God bless our native land" - - - "God be merciful unto us and bless us", if as long as he prays he is recognizing the somber truth that the blessing he receives is meant then to be a blessing to somebody else. I fervently believe, and I submit it to you now, that God works through history and that God works through people. And just as God chooses particular people, so God may choose particular nations. It's a matter of historical record that God at a certain point in history turned to one group of people as He did not turn to any other

people and He called them His "Chosen People" in order that a blessing for all mankind might be accomplished. And as He chose Israel, so He gave to the whole world the Deuteronomic code...

- - there is no, so we are told by people who are in a position to speak -- no greater foundation for morality than the Ten Commandments...

- - and who will deny the fact that through those Chosen People has come the Redeemer for all mankind. And God says, "I have chosen you for this purpose and to this end,"....and as long as they were faithful to Him they received His blessing.

But time and time again He raised up even a foreign power to drag them into the dust, that they might be rebuked and chastened. The God to whom we look is the God of all people, of all nations, but occasionally at certain developments in history He turns to one people, and to another people, that they might be His preferred instrument. Dare you and I believe that in this critical time in world history God is still looking to us, here in the United States of America, and saying, "I have something for you to do by which all mankind might be blessed"?

The man is blind who cannot see the favored position (one uses the word with discretion) in which we happen to find ourselves today -- geographically speaking, if not from the standpoint of our natural and physical resources. With the build-up of scientific acumen -- with all the under-nourished, the under-privileged, the disadvantaged in the world -- is not God saying to us, "This still remains your hour." Therefore we not only have a right but a duty - - - "God be merciful to us...bless us....cause your face to shine upon us - - - that Thy way may be known to all people, Thy saving health among all

nations."

It's good discipline for a man to go back and read repeatedly certain things, particularly as they are associated with certain days. Seldom do I come to this day in the calendar without reminding myself that the Golden Jubilee of Queen Victoria. They made much of the occasion, not only out of respect for the venerable woman, but because of the golden hour in which England found herself. So they came to England, from the far-flung parts of the Empire, with all their pomp, with all their circumstance -- a mighty display of strength, and one might also quickly add, of pride.

Rudyard Kipling was commissioned, so I am told, to write a poem for the occasion...and as he surveyed that scene he wrote his Recessional, which ends:

"Lord God of Hosts, be with us yet - -

- - lest we forget."

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

Sermon - Pastor Raymond Shaheen
August 8, 1971

Text: "He did stay-there two days, and far more believed in Him because of what He Himself said. As they told the woman, 'We don't believe any longer now because of what you said. We have heard Him with our own ears. We know now that this must be the man who will save the world.'"
John 4:41-42 (Phillips)

I can't tell you what it's like today or yesterday. But I can report that on Thursday of this past week the unheard of happened in London. With more foreign visitors than ever before coming to the United Kingdom, the capital city and so-called cross roads of the world experienced its first "tourist jam." An account in the Manchester Guardian had it that people milled in the area around Piccadilly Circus, spilling into the streets from the wide walks to the extent that many motorists stalled their cars from overheating since they were unable to make more than 200 yards in a half-hour's time!

Now you may have some idea as to why with an entire month's holiday to spend in England, Scotland, Wales, we stayed only four nights in London! Who dares to think that refreshment and renewal for body and soul will come where people shove and push?

You see, that's why when we first thought of going abroad, thanks to your gracious gesture last Spring, the decision was made that if it was to be the much-needed respite which would guarantee the re-charging of mind, body and soul that we would head for the country-side. So from town to vil-

lage and village to town we went, up and down and around throughout England, Wales and Scotland. We put up in old country inns and manor houses as often as we could.

All of this leads me to mention that town in Scotland with the strange-sounding name of AUCHERAROER. It was there that we met him. The man who serves as the interesting subject in the introduction to today's sermon - - the first sermon which I am privileged to preach to you so fresh upon our return the day before yesterday.

His name is David Moorby. He's about 30, I would say. You'll pardon the length of this introduction to the sermon, please. It's necessary that David Moorby come into clear focus.

We were instinctively attracted to him as we opened the door, entered his antique shop, and he emerged from behind the semi-drawn curtain that separates his work room from his store. Is there something about a pipe-smoking chap that exudes confidence and trust? Be that as it may, we liked him at once.

He encouraged us to look about and to ask any questions we considered important. We found his items carefully and artistically arranged. His place was not overstocked.

In due time we learned that he had lived in Leeds, attended the University there. His first ambition was to become a physician. For some reason, which we do not now remember, he dropped out of school, got married. He and his wife and their young son Andrew now live in AUCHERAROER. What took him into the antique business? He answered that question magnificently:

"I like old and beautiful things. I like old and beautiful things that are finely crafted, and masterfully so. I like people who like old and beautiful things, finely crafted and masterfully so."

We looked here and there. We found it rather difficult to make up our minds. He was genuinely helpful, and quite circumspect about it. When we asked about the different items, he answered as though each one was a personal friend. He spoke with an interpreter's tongue, also giving us a bit of history and background as he knew it. He did not speak too much. Once he had told us what he knew, and with what warmth and regard he spoke of each object, he stepped aside as though he was quite content to let the clock, the barometer, the chest speak for themselves. When he realized that we were indecisive, he kindly suggested at that point that we might want to look elsewhere in the town - - or - - - if we were to be in the area any length of time, to think it over and possibly return some other time. And that's what we did.

Upon the second visit, we made the purchase.

I've been reflecting a great deal upon that occasion, that encounter with David Moorby, owner and operator of Rachem Antiques in the Scottish town with the strange sounding name of AUCHTERARDER. And here's what I want so much to remember about him, his personality and his technique: he didn't do the selling! He allowed his prized objects to be so displayed, so interpreted, to exposed that they sold themselves! He did it so aptly, so perfectly. I should be very happy indeed if, in whatever years are remaining for me in the preaching of the Gospel, I could profit by his example.

As I think of David Moorby, I see his role so clearly: he provided the

opportunity for encounter. To be sure he selected the items, he artistically displayed them, he spoke of them authoritatively, warmly. But his words were few. He gave ample opportunity for the prized and precious thing to speak for itself.

Now we are ready for the text for this sermon. It is found in the fourth chapter of the Gospel according to John. To be specific - - verses 41 and 42:

"He" (meaning Jesus) "did stay there two days, and far more believed in Him because of what He Himself said. As they told the woman, "We don't believe any longer now because of what you said. We heard Him with our own ears. We know now that this must be the man who will save the world."

Let's put it this way, if you will allow it. Jesus was a tourist-of-sorts, traveling those days from town to village, from village to town. As travellers are wont to do, He became thirsty. He desired to have His thirst satisfied. There was the much-heralded Jacob's Well - - what better place. A woman, who chanced to be there, drew water and gave Him some to drink. It's a poor chap indeed who doesn't master the art of making the most of every experience along the way. Naturally, our Blessed Lord makes much of His encounter. He did, as always, introduce the "eternal dimension." One thing led to another, and for the first time in her life she was dealing with reality - - little realizing at first blush that she in a certain sense was the thirsty one and not He. So completely overwhelmed by what was happening in and to her, she rushed back to town and told the folks there about this tremendous thing that happened there at Jacob's Well - - about the stranger-

come-to-town who was so different, so gloriously different.

They came alright. And they had their own encounter with Jesus. After awhile they said to her - - we believe! But, woman, get it straight, so one might hear them saying, we believe alright but not specifically because of what you told us - - rather because of what we heard for ourselves! Coarsely put - - no one has to ~~sell~~ Jesus to anyone else! He's perfectly able of coming through on His own - - granted He's given the chance - - properly exposed - - properly introduced!

Now back again to that antique shop. There are a few more reflections that are in order.

(from notes for the sermon)

"BE ALERT -- TO GLORY"

Grace, mercy and peace from God
our Father and from His Son,
Jesus Christ, our Blessed Lord.
Amen.

For those of us who on occasion have had to drive the distance between here and New York City, there remains the recollection of the illuminated signs along the New Jersey Turnpike. They simply read: "KEEP ALERT" or "STAY AWAKE" or some such sentiment. For the modern-day driver, as you well know, who goes that course, so seemingly free from traffic lights, maintaining a constant speed, as the hours are whiled away and the miles left behind -- can succumb to monotony and become less alert than what he ought to be.

The warning of the New Jersey Turnpike Commission is a very apt one. There are hazards along the way to which a person ought not to allow himself to become insensitive. Therefore we must stay alert....keep awake.... and we are urged to discipline ourselves to do so.

But life's highways are not simply a series of encounters with possible hazards. There are also the glories and the joys of the road, and they, too, are not to be missed. Granted the turnpike is not the route to take to find them, but that in itself is another story - - yet if the glories of the way are to be appreciated, a like warning has to be given to all of us: Stay awake!....Keep Alert!....Be on the look-out for such-and-such a thing!

Some of our friends held us in good stead on our recent journey through

English country-side. Jack Kaiser, a member of this congregation, served as our tour agent, and he spent the greater part of the time, one day, checking out encyclopedias and travel books, putting on a series of pages certain things he felt we ought not to miss -- we ought to be on the alert, so that when we got into that particular section of the country, we would be sure to see them.....

...Sister Mildred, our Parish Deaconess, as some of you may know, had lived in England for six years, and she took a similar sheet of paper and jotted down the things that she remembered of unusual importance that we ought not to miss, and to paraphrase it, to keep ourselves alerted to the fact that these things were along the way.....

...when we arrived at London's Heathrow Airport we were met by a representative of Boswell and Johnson, a man who over there arranged our schedule for us...and much to our surprise he presented to each of us a book, a very comprehensive book, that had in its detail the accounts of the different places that we might visit....

And now if you can picture us as we drive along in that hired car, going from place to place.....occasionally the driver would say, "Ethel" - - "Winifred" - - why don't you read for us now out of the book, of what lies ahead."

You see, that we might prepare ourselves for what could be seen --

-- at Salisbury Cathedral

-- for what ought not to be missed at Stonehenge

-- for the kind of history that is associated with York Minster

Cathedral.....

Time and time again we were discipling ourselves, preparing ourselves to stay awake, that we might not miss the glory that could be seen.

Now all of this leads me to share with ^{you} the text of this meditation. It's from the Gospel lesson selected for Transfiguration Day, August 6 in the calendar of the Church. Three Gospels record the Transfiguration experience. They are alike in their essence. The 32nd verse of the 9th chapter of the Gospel according to Luke reads like this:

"But Peter and his companions had been overcome by sleep, and it was as they struggled into wakefulness that they saw the glory of Jesus."

Let me remind you of the occasion and the event. Our Blessed Lord took with Him Peter, James and John to a very special place, and while He was there, for whatever may have been the reason, Peter, James and John had quite a bit of difficulty in staying awake....much as my younger friends this morning, who are here in front of me, may have some effort trying to stay awake, **trying to pay attention** to the preacher who stands in front of them. It's not easy, and it may require a little bit of effort.

Well, Peter, James and John were like that. Here they were with Jesus on the mountain-top. Jesus had so many wonderful things He wanted to talk with them about. It was so easy for them to go to sleep - - they were struggling, trying to stay awake. But they made the effort. And because they made the effort, it paid off, and as the Scriptures tell us, they saw Jesus as they had never seen Him before. His countenance was transfigured - - they saw Him in all His glory. But it would never have happened if they had not struggled to stay awake.

Which leads me to remind you, as we travel along the highway of life there is always some special glory to be encountered, but if we are to experi-

ence it, discipline has to be exacted from us....we have to pay the price to stay awake.

Let me suggest to you some of the common glories of life that we might list if we did not discipline ourselves to see them, and to look for them, and to understand them once they happen....

...there is the glory of having a child in our midst - - there is no miracle quite like the miracle of childhood. I vividly recall right now as I stand before you, a two-year old, standing with up-raised face, looking into the yonder blue sky as far as his little eyes could see, and completely overwhelmed by an airplane that caught his fancy.....the wonder of it all....

.....I have a collection of photographs that I've taken recently -- a five-year old in a tomato patch, caught up with the wonder of growing things, his first real encounter with a vegetable garden....and he remembers how the ground was scratched, how the seeds were planted, how the vegetables, the plants themselves were stuck into the ground, the watering that had to be done. And now, much to his surprise, there's a green tomato that becomes red, and not until then can he pluck it...

...the wonder of childhood in our midst....

....the glory that's to be found in that experience, but unless we keep ourselves alert, unless we keep ourselves awake, we shall miss the glory because of their restlessness, because of their lack of understanding of some things that age has taught us.

We might become irritated because of our responsibilities and our obligations we have to fulfill in their behalf. Unless we take ourselves to task, we could become annoyed by their foibles. But the wonder, the glory, of a child in our midst.....

...the wonder and the glory of having a mate to whom one can come home, whose faithfulness is never to be questioned, whose integrity, whose love and whose respect remains undiminished through the years - - a common relationship for many people, yet unless a man and a maid can be themselves alerted to the glory and the wonder of the love that claims them, they could miss it day by day....

...do you remember, in "Fidler On The Roof" -- how the old character, the milkman, asks his wife of twenty-five years: "Do you love me?"....and then as only a practical, prosaic woman could do, she recites the menial chores that she's fulfilled day after day and year after year, and she simply says, "If that isn't love, then tell me what it is!"and much to his amazement, after twenty-five years, he says, "Then you do love me!"

...the glory and the wonder of faithfulness and love and respect on the part of a man or a maid, in each passing year.....

.....the wonder and the glory that remains as we experience in church, in solemn and sacred moments, the undeniable fact of God. I have little patience with people who pooh-pooh the idea of

going to church. With all the ardor of my soul I still believe in a place such as this, and within the gathered company as the Holy Spirit has free reign, God can be revealed to us -- even though we might be unable to explain it, and even when we have our moments when we don't fully understand. I would submit to you that even those who are young, as they are exposed to the worship experience in this place, in their own way, despite their limitations, are being caught up with something....feeling something....that some of us know Sunday after Sunday when we come to this place....

...the glory that is not to be missed on the face of Jesus Christ....men have always wondered what God is like. In all these years we Christians talk about Jesus Christ, but if we don't watch out, we can dismiss Him very easily, as the years pass by, as just another teacher, just another professor - - and never really see Him as Lord and Saviour, who forgives us our sins and bestows upon us the gift of eternal life.....

These are things that do happen - - they're just around the corner - - they are not to be missed. Stay alert! -- Keep awake! -- discipline yourself that you might find them and know them!

Last evening I had a perfectly delightful privilege to go into the home of one of our friends, neighbors, members of this congregation. They were marking their 25th wedding anniversary. Their son and their daughter had planned it for them. After I was there, I returned to the parsonage and sat on the parsonage porch....all alone....and simply reflected on the occasion

and the event.....a perfectly jovial occasion, surrounded by pure, wholesome people, who came to wish them well and to share in their life and in their love. And I thought to myself, there was a glory in that occasion, there was something really grand about it.

And then as fate would have it, if you want to put it that way, I read later that evening about a man who was asked to offer a prayer. Some preacher had found that prayer, and this is what he had to say about it, and then I'm going to read you the prayer.

This preacher says, "I have kept for some time now the copy of a prayer that was offered by Father John J. Hever of St. Joseph's Church in Belmont, Massachusetts. The prayer was offered at a public banquet in the city of Boston. I imagine that the gathered guests," says the preacher, "bracing for the usual funereal tones, prepared to endure a few moments of somberness before going in to enjoy themselves - - " Father Hever must have surprised them when he prayed, when he was asked to offer the prayer for this banquet occasion....just as I suppose a preacher might have surprised people last night if I would have offered a prayer like this when the guests were present for this 25th wedding anniversary occasion. Here's the way this preacher prayed, because he didn't want people to miss the glory and the happiness of that event:

"Almighty God, our Father and friend, we know that Your memory of earthly banquet halls is pretty grim, ever since that first Christmas Eve when an insolent fellow in a greasy apron at the only hotel in town slammed the door right in your mother's pleading face - - "

(imagine a fellow praying like this!)

" . . . well the mills of God grind slowly, but they grind exceedingly fine. And here we are today, twenty centuries later, on a continent that the inn-keeper never knew existed, speaking a language that he never heard - - - and our very first thought before we sit down to our banquet tables is to stand in reverence and to salute Your undying name.

" We're especially happy to make this prayer. And, O Lord, we hope that You hear it. Because this time we're not in church, and this time we're not in trouble. As a rule, when we speak to You, we're either kneeling, against the background of a stained glass window....or buckling on a life preserver - - it's either the routine of religion, or the rush call for help. But today it is gloriously different. Today we want you to bless our joy as we stand poised for a few hours of genial festivity.

"Bless us, then, O Lord, and in Thy goodness grant that the food may be well flavored, the service smooth, and if it isn't asking too much the speeches short."

....well, an unusual prayer, to be sure.

It was a grand and a glorious occasion, and hearts were meant to rejoice. And sometimes you and I miss the glory of God in the happy event. Let's discipline ourselves, then, that we might be made awake, as we journey through life, for all the wonder and the glory of God that's waiting to be seen and to be experienced.

* * * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"ON DOING GOOD"

MAY THY Holy Spirit so possess us, O
God, that we may give reverent atten-
tion to Thy Word. Possess now the mind
and the spirit of the hearer and the
preacher alike, that Thy presence may
be made known to us. Through Jesus
Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

On a stand very near the most-used chair in my study is a stack of books. I refer to it as my "waiting-to-be-read" collection. It increases continually. The book that I've reached for now -- it's happened to be at the top of the pile of which I am about a third through -- has an interesting title, simply three words: "On Doing Good" -- written by a Yale graduate of the past decade and a man who is a staff writer for the New Yorker. He became quite fascinated by the work of the Quakers. He made a deliberate attempt to understand their manner and their mood as best he could. It's an excellent book.

As I stand before you now I'm recalling the words that he quotes from George Fox, the founder of the Quaker movement. George Fox honestly believed that there is that which is of God in every man, and it well behooves all of us to go through life looking for that which is of God in every man. In one of his admonitory epistles, George Fox wrote: "Be patterns, be examples in all countries, in all places, in all islands, in all nations, wherever you come, that your carriage and your life may reach among all sorts of people and it may preach to them. Then you will walk cheerfully over the world, answering that of God in everyone."

It so happened that George Fox practiced what he preached. At almost fifty years of age he crossed the Atlantic and came to the United States, back there in the latter part of the 17th century. He walked all the way, or rode occasionally on horseback, from Maryland to Rhode Island, and then back again. In the journal that he kept he records magnificently the simple statement that wherever he seemed to go, he discovered that the natives (meaning the Indians) "appeared very kind to us."

Now you can afford to make that deduction when you know that you are bent on doing people good, no matter where you may go. And whether you may find it difficult to believe in this present moment, there is a return when such an investment is made. And with all the ardor of my soul I submit to you that the world rightfully belongs to those who are bent on doing good, whose lives become the personification of grace and truth.

Now there are two ways to do good.

One may do good by deliberately deciding that he is going to do it. He'd make up his mind that before the sun sets today, he's going to write that letter, long overdue, and therefore he may have the satisfaction, when day is done, that he has done this good thing. I once knew a man in the community in which I began my ministry who was the Mayor of the city. Little did people realize that there was reason behind his goodness, for he, by deliberate design, every day decided he would never go to bed at night unless he could remember that he had done specifically a good thing for someone, and especially had gone out of his way to do it. No wonder to this very day, when they recall his name, they recall it with reverence and affection. Good can be done when people decide to do it -- they make up their mind that they

have a choice. Evil is done by people who make up their minds that they are going to do evil. And that's part of the hell of it, when evil is done deliberately, by conniving, by scheming....by choice.

But the halo that belongs to goodness, perhaps, if you'll allow me to suggest, is not the halo that belongs to those who decide deliberately to do good. I would affix the halo, if it were in my power, upon those who do good quite unconsciously -- it becomes their second nature. It might be the result that once upon a time they made the decision to become the channel for goodness, to the extent now that it's so natural, that no matter where they may go they spread goodness and kindness.

Now all of this leads me to share with you the text for today's sermon. The text is the 15th verse of the 5th chapter of the Book of the Acts of the Apostles. Allow me to read it for you in its entirety:

"Now many signs and wonders were done.....and more than ever believers were added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women, so that they even carried out the sick into the streets, and laid them on beds and pallets, that as Peter came by at least his shadow might fall on some of them."

Now don't you dare for a minute say that that is pure unadulterated superstition.....don't sell the Apostle Peter, and all that he represents, short. Don't succumb to the notion that these people were superstitiously inclined, that they brought those for whom they had concern, laid them in the street -- never so much as asked Peter to give them a blessing -- but hoped that as he passed by their might be something beneficent in his shadow. You're missing the boat, my friend, if you want to be crass and crude enough to say that this is sheer superstition.

What you and I must recognize -- that in the life of the Apostle Peter

there was a sterling quality, a goodness already recognized -- that people honestly believed that if they could just be in his presence, goodness could not help but radiate in their direction. That's the point at which to begin -- that here was a man who so personified goodness, that there were those, having heard about him, honestly believed that they could just be where his shadow might fall, they themselves would be the better because of it. This is the kind of goodness I think deserves the halo. Not that I would minimize in any way those who begin at the point by being good through deliberate design.

I told the boys and girls this morning in a children's-sermon-sort-of-thing, about an old French legend. I'd be happy to share it with you, if you'll allow it. It's only a legend, mark you....

...but the angels in Heaven looked down upon earth, and they discovered a man whose behavior was exemplary -- they had never quite seen his like. And the angels went to Almighty God and said, "Here is a man so extraordinary that we believe he deserves a special blessing. Dear Heavenly Father, won't you give a special blessing to this man?"

...God answered the angels and said, "Of course I'll give a special blessing. But in this case I think the man will have to ask for it. I refuse to give him a special blessing until he himself names it."

...the angels descended from Heaven, with their wings they hovered over this unusual man and said to him,

"God pays attention to you. Your virtue is not unnoticed. Our Heavenly Father wants to give you a special blessing. What is it that you would like to have?"

...and the old character of whom I speak with so great affection and respect simply said, "But God already is so good to me, I can't ask for any special blessing!"

...but the angels, bent on their mission which they seemed to think they had to fulfill, said, "But you've got to name something! Can't you think of something in particular?"

...and quite unexpectedly the interesting codger came up with this reply: "Let it be this -- ask God to allow me the grace to go around through life doing good unconsciously!".....so bent was the man on doing good that he never wanted to miss a single opportunity, whether he was aware of it or not.

...the angels returned to Heaven...they brought in their report. And as you might expect, God said, "It shall be answered." And to that day, according to the legend, wherever the man went, wherever he walked, whatever he did, he brought a benediction.....people were better just because he had been there!

Did it ever occur to you how tremendous is the influence and the power of one man's personality. Whatever the politics may be, put it aside, and think now of the man and of the man alone. One man once characterized Dwight Eisenhower as the kind of a man who when he walked into a room, people began to think together. He had that charismatic quality -- at least according to the appraisal of this man. I once knew a man who, it seemed to me, if when I walked out into the hall and he had gone by, even though I didn't know that he had gone by, I could breathe something of the frozen atmosphere.....the tremendous power and influence of a life that touches other lives....

....so God must have smiled very broadly that day when
He said, "This will be the special blessing, that he
might do good, and that he might do it quite unconsciously."

One of the rewarding features of this trip, the holiday that you allowed me so recently, was that the final week was spent for the most part out in the country-side. And by deliberate design I was given the opportunity to spend several days reading, writing, reflecting. In my own way I look back upon the "Sad Sixties" -- the latter part of that decade in particular -- how up-tight so many of us were. It was an ouchy generation, that's what it was. No matter where you went, you were bumping into people who were mad...mad at this...mad at that....mad at themselves.....mad at you. We had our riots, we assassinated our leaders. It was a sad decade, the latter part specifically.

...as I sat there in that English country-side I reflected so much.

...and then I remembered how meetings were held...how petitions were signed....how committees were formed.....how resolutions were

passed...how speeches were made. In my time of reflection I said,

"So much of it has passed for nothing!"

Oh, I'm not denying the necessity for formulating one's thoughts and reducing them to writing and making resolutions. But now that the decade has run its course, I look back and I can see a shining light here and there. And who were the shining lights? - - the simple ones, who simply went about day after day after day, never allowing themselves to get caught up in tension and strife.....simply doing good, and being kind, to as many as they could, as often as they could, wherever they could.

Is it too much to suggest that the world rightfully belongs to them? I am not minimizing in any way whatsoever the power of an idea, and what happens through the influence of a word. An idea and a word can create a revolution and change the course of society. But I'm also remembering that words and ideas have little value until they come alive in people. I'm not forgetting the magnificent classic statement regarding Jesus Christ. It is not simply that the Word came, but the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us.

The teachings of the words of Jesus Christ are remembered not just because He spoke them, but by the way He lived them. This is what gives the validity to the life of Jesus Christ. I plead with you with all the ardor of my soul, to allow your life, and I plead to God for my life, to become a channel of goodness.....deliberately.....unconsciously.

When I used to conduct services in the Lycoming County Jail, on the corner of 3rd and Williams Street in Williamsport, Pennsylvania, I used to smile at the kind of ironic thing that one prisoner had once done. Who challenged him to do it I don't know, but somewhere he must have had a course in

printing - - somebody had given him a large piece of paper-board....and he inscribed these sentiments, and it was placed in the chapel:

"I shall not pass this way again. Any good,
therefore, that I can do, let me do it now."

One time there was a Gospel writer who summed up on one grand sentence the meaning of the life of Jesus Christ:

"He went about doing good."

...I dare you to have that become your epitaph.

* * * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"WHAT A DIFFERENCE!"

Through Jesus Christ, Thy Son,
our Lord. Amen.

My debt increases in each passing week to a certain set of parents who share a five-year old with me. Fortunate indeed is any person who has a relationship with a youngster. Unless it happens to you, you can't betin to tell others what a significant thing it can be in your life....to look at the world through a child's eyes...a very rewarding experience.

Occasionally when this five-year old and I have time together, he gladdens my heart and suggests that I might tell him a Bible story. Of the number of different stories that he's been told, if you were to ask him right now what is his favorite, without any hesitation he might say, the story about Zaccheus. May I recall it for you very quickly....

...the word had gotten around that Jesus, the itinerant one, was coming to Jericho. His reputation had preceeded Him...and so the people flocked out into the streets to get a good glimpse of Jesus Christ. The men left the bazaars...the women left their houses...men and children came in from the fields. They were all there. They might never again have this chance.

...there was one chap, however, who had difficulty in finding a vantage-point from which he might be able to see Jesus Christ. It wasn't simply just because he was short of stature. It was primarily

because he was the kind of a man he was. He was a man who gyped people. He exploited his own particular situation, he took advantage of them. . . .

. . he had a political appointment...the Roman government said, "You return to us so many dollars, or so much in taxation, from your territory - - but once you've collected that amount of money, you can keep everything else for yourself."

...responding to the base quality of human nature, he bled his people. And they knew it. Subsequently, they hated and despised this man Zaccheus.

Now you can see why, when he came and wanted to get a glimpse of Jesus Christ, there wasn't anyone who was about to move over and say, "Zaccheus, I'll make room for you. Come, stand alongside of me" - - he didn't get any such treatment . .

. . but they shoved him and they pushed him. And if they didn't actually ignore him, they did treat him with pronounced hostility.

Not to be outdone, however, he was determined to get a glimpse of Jesus Christ. He runs down the street, he gets ahead of the people, he climbs up a sycamore tree, and there he screens himself behind the branches. But as Jesus comes to that sycamore tree, Jesus looks up and He sees the sycamore branches being parted - - and there the brown, dark eyes of Zaccheus peering at Him. And Jesus takes the initiative, and He says, "Zaccheus, you get yourself down -- right now! -- because you and I are going to have supper together. And, Zaccheus, I'm going to go to your house, and I'm going to eat with you."

Zaccheus gets himself down, he gives the word to his messenger, who runs off . . .

supper is made ready. And they eat and they eat.....and they talk

and they talk . . .

And Zaccheus is facing Jesus Christ. And as he faces Jesus Christ he says to Jesus Christ, "You know what - - I haven't been all that I should have been. I haven't done right by people, Jesus. And now that I've met you, it's going to be different! Instead of taking from people, I'm going to give. And if I've taken anything from any man that I shouldn't have taken, I'm going to give it back four times! - - from now on, Jesus, since I've met you, it's going to be different!"

. . and once that story's been told to that five-year old -- can you hear him now, as he did say when the story was finished:

"Wonderful!"

...little realizing, of course, all that he said in that one word. But that's exactly what happens when a man is encountered by Jesus Christ. If the encounter is at all effective, from that moment on his life becomes different - - and the only descriptive that can be spoken by any man is "wonderful!"

Now this is what I want to talk to you about this morning: a man's encounter with Jesus Christ, and the resulting difference. Ah, there's a text for this sermon. There's only one real text that applies, there's only one text that can serve as the basis for the sermon you're hearing right now. And I'm turning to our old friend, J. B. Phillips, for he translates this text magnificently. It's the 17th verse of the 5th chapter of the Second Letter that Paul wrote to a group of Christians who happened to live in a town called Corinth. And the Apostle Paul, who wrote that letter, is talking about the Christian encounter - - that is, the encounter of a man with Jesus Christ.

And the Apostle Paul says, "For if any man be in Christ, he becomes a new person altogether."

. . that's a masterful way of saying: he becomes different, entirely different!

With all the ardor of my soul I stand at this sacred desk to talk with you this morning about that difference. If the encounter with Jesus Christ is to be made effective at all, then there should be a difference in that man's life. Now let's understand some things clearly right now. . . .

- - I haven't come to talk to you about what it means to be a good Lutheran...as earnestly as I adhere to Lutheran teaching and doctrine.....

- - I haven't come to this sacred desk to talk to you about what it means to be a good Protestant....as firmly as I am committed to the Protestant tradition.....

- - nor have I come to this sacred desk to talk to you about what it means to be a good church member.....zealous as I am in my regard for the holy catholic, the holy Christian Church, and not only the desirability but the necessity for a person to be identified with the community and the body of believers.....

But I have come with all the ardor of my soul to talk to you about what it means to be a Christian. And what it means to be a Christian is simply this: it means to become a new person -- a new person altogether -- entirely different from what a person was before he had an encounter with Jesus Christ.

I am to be numbered among those, and gladly would I take my stand, with those who maintain that somewhere along the line there has to be this encounter --

that there can be no meaning whatsoever to Christian commitment aside from the Christian experience. Now it may happen gradually, scarcely perceptible, in its process of maturation and development. But it should happen.

For some it may be very dramatic - - - John Wesley could point back to that evening, May 25, 1735...in Aldersgate Street Mission...when some chap was standing up and talking about Luther's Exposition of the Epistle to the Romans - - and it was then and there, as he never forgot and would never allow anybody else to forget it -- he said, "I found my heart strangely warmed"...and from that moment on there was a difference that characterized the life of John Wesley . . .

...and I have to say it to you quite parenthetically, although not incidentally -- John Wesley had been a church member -- he was even ordained a priest in the Anglican church -- he even crossed the Atlantic with a desire to evangelize the natives, the Indians, in Virginiaand as some of you undoubtedly know, on his way back to England he had a relationship, an experience, with a group of Moravians, and he found that they had a spiritual sensitivity - if you please, a Christ-dwelling-within-their-hearts, that he didn't have. And this started up stirrings that he couldn't ignore . . .

And then there was that night -- May 25, 1735 -- was that the year? -- and was it at a quarter-to-nine? -- that he said: "I found my heart strangely warmed" some can do it that way!

And then some become aware of it only after a period of time has elapsed

by which the perception begins to set in. Nonetheless, the fact remains that there is such a thing as the transformed heart, the converted person, and where a man can say, this is what my life was like before - - this is what my life is like since! And if you don't believe that, my friend, then you have yet to understand what real Christianity is.

For real Christianity does adhere to the fact that human nature can be changed, that a difference can set in, that a new man can be born. This is what the Christian Gospel is all about, and as you read the pages of the New Testament, you come on one bit of evidence after another.

Take that man Saul, re-named Paul, as a good example:

...a man with zeal to kill Christians -- then there is the time and place where his life is stayed and completely turned around! And as another man could look upon his experience and use his own words in a language that we might better understand -- it's Paul himself who says, "As I became a man in Christ, I became a new person altogether."

Step outside the pages of the New Testament for a moment, if you wish --

...there was that saint, beloved by all people -- Francis of Assissi, the son of a very wealthy merchant -- who, in one evening, could spend as much money living it up, eating and wining and dancing -- spend as much money one night as any number of people who lived in his village would earn in an entire year! Then, one day, he became aware that it was possible for Christ to dwell in his heart.....and from that time on, Francis of Assisi is characterized by a life that lives for others!

. . . Ah, long before Dietrick Bonhoeffer, there were those who maintained that to be a man in Christ is to be Christ's man, and what is it to be Christ's man but to be a man for others. . .

Again I say, read the New Testament for yourself, and one example after another -- redeemed.....transformed.....completely changed in nature!

"For if any man be in Christ, he becomes
a new person altogether."

Now how do you characterize that difference? I honestly believe that until a man sees Christ, until a man allows Christ to take over, he is self-centered, he thinks of life through his own eyes. He thinks in terms of himself, beginning and ending. These are the determining factors.

But when a man has his encounter with Jesus Christ, Christ takes over! Instead of self, Christ is enthroned. The same man who said, "If a man be in Christ, he becomes a new person altogether," is the same man who said, "For me to live is Christ . . . I live, yet not I, but Christ lives in me"! This is what it is to become that new person, to look at life through Christ's eyes -- to love as Christ loves -- to become as concerned as Christ is concerned for people.

Lloyd C. Douglas was at one time, as some of you may know, the Pastor of Luther Place Church in the District of Columbia. He left the ministry to serve his Lord as an author and a writer. One of his best-known novels is "The Robe", and in "The Robe" there is a character named Marcellus....and Marcellus is telling his fiancée, Diana, of his encounter with Jesus Christ and the difference that it's making in his life. Now Diana is not a Christian, and she has no intention of becoming a Christian, and she sees the threat to her and her way of life, if Jesus Christ remains in the ascendancy in the life of Marcellus.

. . . and she pleads with Marcellus, "Don't talk about it -- Don't do anything at all about it -- let's pretend that it never happened!" ...that's the gist of her words to Marcellus. And as I remember, Marcellus replies to her and he says he cannot be as she would have him be, because now that he's been met by Christ -- there's a difference -- that he cannot ignore, that he cannot deny.

In Sweden, they tell me, that people wear a finger ring for the different professions or trades. For instance, they recognize a chimney-sweep by the laurel leaves and the thistle on the ring that he may wear . .

- - the carpenter has a series of acacia leaves.....on the ring that he may wear
- - high school teachers have the insignia of an oak leaf on the ring that they may wear.....

So you may tell what a man is by an outward sign.

But quite frankly, there is no outward sign, such as a ring, or an insignia that a man may wear, that may prove to you that he is a Christian. Just wearing a cross is no sure sign that a man is a Christian. There is no outward symbol, such as this kind of insignia, that you can trust. But there is a sign, that you may know that a man is a Christian. Martin Luther said, "Hereby a man can know that the birth of Christ is made effective in him, if he takes upon himself the need of another, the need of his brother." That folk tune that they sing now quite often: "They will know that we are Christians by our love . . . "

Like any pastor whose summer vacation has been spent, he returns to his

parish eager to take up the responsibilities of another fall and winter season. I don't know that I've ever returned to the work that claims me with the same degree of zeal that I have for the work this year, for the simple fact that above all else, in our relationship as Pastor and people, there must be a renewed emphasis on the transforming quality of Jesus Christ in people's lives! For this is what all of our energy must be spent for, and to this end we must direct all of our talent and our skill. Our concern will not be with building a stronger organization, but our concern must always be with the deepening of the life of the individual spiritually. It's the transformed individual that makes a transformed congregation. And if you despair sometime of the institutionalized church, get on your knees and ask that the Holy Spirit will so possess the minds and the spirits of those in positions of responsibility that their lives will be transformed. So we ought to pray for one another:

....."For if any man be in Christ, he becomes a new person altogether."

Grasmere, England's delightful lake district - we stayed one night at Michael's Nook -- a very delightful spot, secluded as the name itself might indicate. There, as we waited to go into the dining room one night, we saw a plaque -- Michael's Nook had been awarded a distinction, one of 20 places in all of England to be recognized for its superb quality of food and service. Said the entrepreneur who owns Michael's Nook, he was reluctant to put the award on display -- "but my help insisted that it be put on display, and I said to them, 'Very well, you may display it, if only with renewed effort on your part, you see that the standard is maintained -- for now our clientele have a right to expect a little something more from us than they might get somewhere else.'"

We who cherish the name Christian -- bear the name gladly, gratefully -- if only you are willing to see that the standard is maintained.

"If any man be in Christ, he's a new person - - "

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"THE PERIL OF OUR DAY"

(Luke 5:27-28)

SO THAT, O GOD, whatever might be
said from this sacred desk should
meet the deep need of those who are
here, may Thy Holy Spirit now rest
upon both the preacher and the
listener alike. Through Jesus Christ,
Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

Let's begin directly with the text this morning. Frankly, I'm usually a bit uncomfortable when I don't. After all, the Lutheran Church maintains that whatever is taught, whatever is preached, must be rooted and grounded in the Scriptures. We pride ourselves in being a Bible-church. Symbolical of that fact is the open Bible in front of you when you come to worship. And any sermon preached from this sacred desk should not only be rooted and grounded in Scriptures, to the end that the preacher might be able to point to chapter and verse, but the sermon itself must be true, in spirit, to Scripture.

Do you know that it is a custom in some congregations of the Protestant tradition that at a particular time in the ritual, a man or a person carefully selected brings to the sacred desk the Bible -- it's part of the ritual -- and as he places it on the pulpit, the congregation is made mindful of the exalted place that it occupies in the life and spirit of a congregation.

So if you don't mind, let's begin directly with the text. It's the 5th chapter of the Gospel according to Luke, the 27th and the 28th verses:

"After this he (meaning Jesus) went out,
and saw a tax collector, named Levi,
sitting at the tax office; and he said

to him, 'Follow me.' And he left
everything and rose and followed him."

...simply put, 'just the facts, ma'am, just the facts' -- no interpretation.
What now can we make of this text?

Perchance that you might better understand it, let's go back and take the look historically. Jesus Christ, as He went around from place to place, was looking for likely candidates and promising recruits. One day, His eye fell upon this man, Levi or Matthew by name, and He said to him: "Follow me" - - - and just like that, Matthew closed his books, got up from where he was, walked away! And ever again returned.

Now for our purpose this morning, I challenge you to think of someone whom you may know, and on the basis of prior conversation with that person, you know that he's fed up with his day's work. He just doesn't find it spiritually rewarding or satisfying in any sense. Each morning that he gets up, he dreads going back to the place where he must go. Today's Sunday. Now picture that person, not tomorrow (Labor Day) but on Tuesday morning, when he has to go back to work. And on the basis that you already know, you are either surprised or not surprised when you are told that by 11:00 o'clock on Tuesday morning he gathered all of his papers together, puts them in a file, puts his own personal items in his brief case....walks away from his desk. And that's it! He doesn't go back. Right now you may think of certain people that you know who could do just that sort of thing.

Last summer I gave the greater part of my vacation period to preparing a lecture on "The Ministry and The Church Faces The Seventies." When that lecture was delivered in a number of different places, I was amazed at the number of people who spoke to me about some of the material incorporated in

that lecture. For in that lecture I incorporated what I'd found in my studies, that a surprising number of men in the ministry, after ten or fifteen years serving their Lord in congregations, had come to the conclusion that this wasn't for them -- it was no longer personally satisfying. They had had one disappointment after another in their inter-personal relationships with members in a congregation, or the high hopes and dreams that they had ~~xx~~ for the commitment of their people didn't materialize. The number is so great that I must tell you that the church is now subsidizing career centers, to which a preacher can go, and after a while, once a battery of tests has been taken and he's had a series of personal interviews and a number of group encounters, will either be told that he ought to stay in the ministry or he ought to get out - - - there are any number of people who fall in this category -- who no longer find their day's work a satisfying situation. The disappointments are just too great.

But I haven't come to this sacred desk this morning to talk to you about an individual and his "job fitness," or his job placement. But I have come to tell you that I do know this: that for any number of people there are folks who find themselves in a situation which they would like to change, but they cannot. So they have to stay.

Now what happens when a man can't change his situation? Well, I honestly believe that his predicament can be improved upon. And that's where Jesus Christ comes into the picture. We may have to stay where we are, but our predicament can be improved.

I suppose for some of us who try to put our finger upon the pulsebeat of our day, we are inclined to admit that for any number of people today, they go from hour to hour as disappointed people. Life just isn't working out as

they had hoped and dreamed. I once had a very wise person say to me -- brace yourself for it -- "You'll never experience any time in life when you will be completely free from problems. You just exchange one set of problems for another" . . . and some people have lived long enough to know that in the exchange of one set of problems for another, you go from one disappointing experience to another, for so seldom does a man have the joy of knowing that he's resolved his problems to his satisfaction. They remain to vex, and to haunt, and to prove themselves disconcerting. So maybe the characteristic of our age is that we are a people who are enduring one disappointment after another and are consigned to remain in a disappointing situation.

It's been a very gratifying experience for me occasionally to go back and read the sermons preached by two men who left a marked influence upon my life, in my impressionable years, especially when I was in college and in theological seminary -- the sermons of Paul Scherer, the prince of the Lutheran pulpit -- the sermons of Harry Emerson Fosdick, greatest perhaps of all American preachers, three decades ago. He used to preach on Sunday Vespers. Even last night as I was putting the final touch on this sermon, I reached for a volume of his sermons, preached in 1940. What Fosdick said then any preacher in the land could say today. For the characterization of his time is the characterization of our day. Let me read for you the opening paragraph of his sermon . . .

"One powerful influence in the life of all of us is the fact that our generation -- (he speaks now in terms not of a single day, but of an entire generation) -- - "One powerful influence in the life of

all of us is the fact that our generation has lived through a long series of major disappointments. To go no farther back than the Great War. We plunged into that, hoping to make the world safe for democracy, only to recognize later that the outcome was futile. Then to plan to organize people and the World Court and the League of Nations -- many of us turned to these with high hopes. And we have lived to see the great buildings on Lake Geneva become empty shells, while millions march off to war all over again. Then there was a day of economic affluence, it seemed a dawn filled with hope of abundance of life for all the people.... ..only to fade into wide-spread penury that at that time no help could reach. Even so we did not believe that the nations would madly add to all this another world conflict. But today Europe and Asia are aflame. We have lived through a generation of successive and colossal disappointments, one frustrating hope piled upon another . . . "

...and that, too, could be the characterization of our day.

Among the different periodicals that come to my desk is one that I reach for as soon as I can because I want to thumb through its pages quickly to read the cartoons. This one I found quite intriguing and fascinating . . .

. . . a man is pictured, chin in hand, facing a television set. The artist has done his best to write upon the face of that man bewilderment, confusion, and as I read it -- disappointment. But he's staring at the television set. And then there appears on the huge screen of that television set (it seems

huge - larger than usual) a crudely drawn message. And this is it:

"We know something that you don't
know - - - sit tight, and pray."

Maybe this man -- bewildered, confused, disappointed -- staring out, waiting for some message from beyond, is the symbol of our day...and the only voice that comes back to him is the voice that says:

"We know something that you don't
know - - - sit tight, and pray."

And my appraisal of that chap, if I can read him correctly, is that he remains bewildered and confused and disappointed, because he's disappointed that somebody knows something that he doesn't know! And he just doesn't know what it is that they know. And as a consequence, he's not about to sit tight, and even more so, he's not about to pray.

We're not happy to make the admission, but any number of people we know, if they're not dejected, they are disappointed. If they could, they'd give almost anything to have life become just a little bit better than it is. If only their predicament could be improved. I am happy to tell you that it's possible. With all the strength that God gives me, I want to tell you that it's possible.

In reality this text that I read for you at the beginning of the sermon tells us more about Jesus Christ than it does about Matthew, or Levi. Because in the day in which Jesus Christ lived, He too experienced one disappointment after another....they were not encouraging days. They were really discouraging days, and the outcome was very, very bleak. Nonetheless, the Nazarene carpenter, lonely as the effort might have been, persevered patiently as He looked at this person and that person, hoping to awaken within them the reali-

zation that the situation, while it might not improve, their predicament could. Wherever He went, He went looking for human possibilities. More often than not, He was disappointed. He didn't get much of a return for the investment that He made. But every now and then He would find a John, and an Andrew, and a Simon Peter, and today a Matthew. He always went looking for somebody yearning for a better self, for an improved predicament. He went looking even when He was half-dead upon a Cross....

...and in that dying moment for a thief. while his
situation could not be changed, his predicament was.

This is the Gospel message - - - in Christ and through Jesus Christ, as a man responds to Christ, his predicament is changed. He's transformed from sinner into saint. . . .

. . . he's converted from hopelessness and despair
to the promises of Jesus Christ. With God, really now,
it's never a matter of going from worse to worse. It's
basically a matter of going from better to better.

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"TWO AT ONCE"
(Hebrews 11:27)

LET US, O GOD, be honest enough to understand that it is not enough for the preacher to prayerfully prepare the sermon, but also the listener must likewise prepare. To that end, possess our hearts and minds together. Through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

Let me read the text for you not only once, but twice. But in doing so I'm realistic enough to know that I could turn you off, because the text in itself, in all likelihood, won't turn you on. It is that kind of text. So, here it goes -- Hebrews 11:27, these words:

"For he endured as seeing him who is invisible"

Second time:

"For he endured as seeing him who is invisible"

The text is not easy to understand. Of course it isn't. Because it comes from an entire letter that is one of the most difficult to understand in the entire New Testament. And yet I dare say there is no letter in the entire New Testament that's more profound and worthy of study on the part of the believer.

That you might better understand all of this, let me introduce you all over again to the historical perspective. This letter was written between 60 and 90 A.D. It was written to Christians of Hebrew extraction who lived in the Imperial City of Rome. It was written, presumably, by a man who had a

first-hand relationship with Jesus Christ, one of the few who remained. The first-generations of Christians, now, had pretty well run their course and gone to their reward. But how about this second generation of Christians? Well, that's what caused this writer some concern.

They lived in Rome -- not a very easy place for a Christian to live in. If you know anything at all of secular history, you know that this was the time when the emperors were persecuting Christians. The church itself, presumably, had never come upon such persecution before or since. Now to Christians, second-generation Christians at that, who were trying to find their way through life, somebody wrote them this letter. And what he had in mind was that they might be encouraged, that they might be sustained, that they might know that it is possible to stick with it, that they didn't have to give up. For it would have been a very easy thing to give up.

Let me do now what I've done for you on occasion in the past fifteen years -- I've recited for you a paragraph or two out of a page of a history book...In essence that's exactly what it is....which brings to our remembrance the kind of thing that they had to experience in the time of persecution. All right, put yourself in the historical picture....

...you're a Christian. Somewhere along the line you have told Jesus Christ that you will be faithful, that you recognize not only is there no one greater in your life, that He is Lord above all lords, King above all kings.....

...then there comes along an emperor who says, "I'm divine -- I am even greater than your Jesus. You will do homage to me -- you will bow the head in my name -- you will give me such tribute -- "

. . . and because you have been reared and trained in the Faith so well, you say to yourself, this I cannot do.

. . alright -- what does the emperor do then? He issues decree after decree which means the Christian will be persecuted. So as a Christian you constantly run the risk, in that day, of (1) being chained to a chariot and being dragged through the dust of the street, until you lie lifeless; (2) maybe the emperor would have employed this: he's invited some select friends to the amphitheatre -- he'd like 'a little special entertainment.' Diabolically possessed, he figures out, wouldn't it be a nice thing to do - -

(how despicable can a man be!)

- - at a precise moment, when my guests need to be entertained, to issue the word to my imperial guard, and they'll drive from the dungeon a hand-ful of Christians out into the arena....and at the same time they will release the hungry lions - - I'll teach those Christians a thing or two - - I'll make sport of them....and that's exactly what happened; or, torture technique #3: among others, of course, the emperor is having some guests in for dinner. They'll have dinner in the garden. They want to make the most of the occasion and stay there long after darkness sets in. The garden should be illuminated by night....he devises the diabolical scheme of taking these Christians -- "I'll teach

them!" he says, and fastens and secures their bodies to a couple of 2x4's, so it would seem, fastened together....
..and there they're planked upright...their bodies have been previously dipped in oil....and then when darkness sets in, he ignites the bodies of Christians. Perish the thought -- they serve as torches in the blackness of night.

Now you have a bunch of second-generation Christians exposed to that kind of plight. Since human nature is as it is, you run the risk of their getting 'chicken' -- succumbing. So whoever wrote this letter to the Christians, the Hebrew Christians in Rome, says, What do you do when your world presses in on you like this? . . . or if your own world is about to fall apart because of brutal forces that beat in on you?

...bless his soul, that writer of this Epistle says, "Why you take the historical perspective, that's what you do! -- you take a good backward look and try to find out what other people did in difficult days."
So you come upon that magnificent 11th chapter in the Epistle to the Hebrews, which I would encourage you to read repeatedly. It's verily a catalogue of the saints -- people who lived in difficult places at difficult times. He says - -

"Take Abraham as an example - - his was not an easy day, beset by problems on every hand -- but what did he do? He kept persevering patiently, keeping his eye on an ideal, because something had been promised to him, that at that moment was beyond his reach...but he still kept his eye on the ideal. . .

In that 11th chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews he said - -

"Take that man Moses as an example - - he was surrounded by oppression and slavery on every side...and the Egyptians were giving him a tough time....and when he got the Egyptians off his back, as he led the Children of Israel through the wilderness, he had one hostile force after another as they wandered around for forty years. But what did Moses do? - - "

...well, that's where the text comes in. This is where he happens to write the words that constitute the words for this text. . .

- - "why Moses, bless his soul - - endured - - that's what he did. He stuck with it - - "as seeing someone who was invisible."

Now that difficult text, which is worthy of study, really says to us: the saints who persevered made it their business to live in two worlds at the same time. Well now, let's back up for a little bit. Personally and subjectively, we do live in two worlds - - sometimes more than two worlds at one time. Every individual does that. Somewhere in my files I have that poem, which I should have memorized for you -- I can only give you the opening sentence:

"Within my earthly temple there's a crowd;
There's one of me that's humble, and there's
one of me that's proud - - "

...and then he goes on line after line to spell out the same theme -- these conflicting selves all within himself. And then he ends up with a lament: if only he knew just which one was really he!

Well I have news for you, brother - - I don't know that it's as simple as that. For every single one of us is made a combination of selves...every single one

of us is a combination of saint and sinner - - sometimes more sinner than saint.....more often than not. Sometimes, like right now (wouldn't you like to believe it!) - - more saint than sinner! Lutheran theology spells it out exceptionally well, and refers to all of us who are believers as the sinning saved --- that's what we are - - we remain sinners, who are being saved. But we're sinners to the very day that we die - - no matter how much I can tell you by good authority of Scripture that you are being numbered in the ranks of the redeemed. So we do go on living in more than one world at a time. And this causes any number of people a great deal of trouble. They just can't become integrated...they just can't straighten out their selves, within themselves.

Several years ago we took a grand group of young people to Clagett Center for a retreat experience. The man in charge of the program decided to expose them to a motion picture entitled "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde" -- you remember, Robert Louis Stevenson's great story. There was that character, saint and sinner. There were times when he wanted very, very much to be the sinner....and he was always haunted by the fact that he was meant to be a saint. (This is a preacher's interpretation of the story). And of course there was always the fact that he had his moments when he wanted very, very much to be a saint....and at the same time there was the pull to be the sinner - - - the good man and the rascal. So he devised, so he thought, that drug, or that serum, which he would take, and then according to his pleasure, he could be so completely the rascal, or he could be so completely the good man.

Well as you remember the story, it just doesn't work out. The fact of life is that tension always remains -- so stained are we by original sin --

and yet at the same time so marked are we by the image of God. Ape - angel, alright. We live in two worlds.

Now move out into the larger sphere -- the world in which the Christian has to live is a world that brings pressure upon the world of his own inner self, whatever that self may be. You and I have one world, maybe, when we come here on a Sunday morning. Correctly or not, we earnestly hope and pray that when we're here we can have good thoughts....thoughts of Heaven...thoughts of the brotherhood of all mankind. We deliberately shut out the world, so that by the time we are here, we might be completely free to think the thoughts of God. But within a half-hour after we're here, and even for some of you right now while you are here, there is the struggle to keep the pressure from that world outside from taking over. And the world outside, quite frequently, is a very brutal world. It can beat a man to bits. It can destroy his finest self. It's a world in which rape and murder exist. It's a world, when we evaluate it, we have to admit that we haven't progressed as spiritually in that world as we would like. We can't escape it. It's there.

What, now, does a Christian do in the face of that? Do I have to tell you that in my relationship with any number of you, I have met people who in all honesty tell me that if they could, they'd hie themselves away from where they are to that idyllic spot, where the pressures are not as brutal or a man can be guaranteed that he won't be broken. There are some people who go on day after day after day finding the present situation, in this world, well-nigh intolerable....and if they had their way, they'd get as far from it as they possibly can. But they can't.

Doesn't the Christian have a word, then, to those who are caught up in two worlds at one time? Yes! The word is: you go on. You're meant to stick with it. Not simply to stick with it, but to endure it. And not simply to

endure it, but to endure it triumphantly....triumphantly in the sense that you rise above it. And in order to do that, you keep your eye constantly upon what is invisible in that world -- the power of love, and the power of goodness -- adherence to the eternal principle of truth. The Christian Church is always talking about something over and above and beyond this world. It's the Christian Church that's always shouting back to the world the eternal verities. That's why the writer of this Epistle to the Hebrews could say that the chap back there in the old day -- he endured alright, because he kept his eye upon what was invisible.

I envy those who can paint. It must be a wonderful thing to be an artist, and to have a concept or an idea, and then to put it on a canvas. Because I can't paint, I study sometimes the techniques of those who can. And I keep reminding myself something I learned about a painter. Do you know what, if he's going to do a landscape, what he first does? -- so they tell me -- he decides on the sky and the horizon, and once he's painted that in, then everything else that appears in his painting is drawn from the sky beyond the horizon. Christians are people like that! -- who determine their response to the landscape of the world, pilgrims as they are, but never taking their eye away from what's beyond!

Don't you dare think this is nothing but preacher talk! If time allowed and if you would require it, I could give you Exhibit A after Exhibit A in the lives of people in this congregation who have kept to the road, in a world whose pressures were constantly beating upon them and would break them if they could. But they kept their sanity...enduring.... with their eye upon that which others could not see, even the sustaining, directing hand of God. This I most certainly believe.

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

Prayer - Pastor Raymond Shaheen
September 12, 1971

WE'RE ABOUT to go now, Heavenly Father, and we're thankful that we could be here and with one another.

There are still some things that we'd like to talk about before we go. We'd like to have the assurance that once we turn our back upon this altar, that we can have your continuing presence. It's one thing to be made aware of your nearness here, but it's another thing to be made aware of ~~xxx~~ it tomorrow morning at 8:00 o'clock... ..Tuesday afternoon at 3:00 o'clock....the heat and pressure of life. Help us to understand that this is what you are meant for, to be a continuing presence, to sustain us, to direct us, and as we put our trust in You, to be redeemed from our sinfulness.

NOW, Heavenly Father, let us know that you hear our prayer, not only for ourselves but for those for whom we have responsibility. There are people who depend upon us. We dare not fail them. But it's not easy to meet their needs. We so soon run out of love and patience. O God, help us to that end.

Then before we go, help us to understand that You will hear our prayer for our nation, in these trying times - - give wisdom to those who make decisions that affect countless numbers of people.

O GOD, hear the anguish of our hearts as we cry out for peace, in a world that isn't so sure that it knows about how to make a peace. Dear God, in our helplessness, tell us that there is a way.

Through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. OUR FATHER . . .

"GOD'S STANDARD OF JUDGMENT"
(Matthew 25:44-45)

HELP US to understand, O God, that
no sermon is worth preaching, no
sermon is worth listening to, un-
less through the sermon there can
be heard the echo of the Eternal
Voice, no matter how feeble it may
be. Through Jesus Christ, Thy Son,
our Lord. Amen.

Really now, old Cotton Mather (that sounds disrespectful -- I should
say the Rev. Mr. Cotton Mather) -- wouldn't be able to get to first base today
if he were to return to the American pulpit. He was that firebrand preacher,
you know, back there in the 17th century up there in New England, who occa-
sionally would go to the sacred desk and hold his listener spellbound (at
least those who would stay awake). For you see, it was his custom to preach
for at least an hour and a half. That's about four times the while that you
will be sitting as this sermon is being preached.

Oh, it wasn't just the length of his sermons that wouldn't get him to
first base today -- it was also the kind of preaching. Let this sermon title,
as an example, indicate the tone and the tenor of what he had to say as he
went to the pulpit: "Sinners In The Hands Of An Angry God"

-- that was his
famous sermon, a good sample of much of his preaching. Once I read a part of
that sermon. I don't remember much that he said in the sermon, but I do re-
member the foot-note that appeared at the bottom. The editor had something to

say. He indicated how Cotton Mather would keep people on the edge of their seats -- at least those who were still awake, as he depicted for them the condition of men and women who would be brought to the brink of the damned, and that kind of torture that would be in store for those who are consigned to Hell.

Well Cotton Mather wouldn't have much of a chance in the American pulpit today.....not just because people won't sit still for ninety minutes to hear a sermon, but also they're not about to listen to that kind of preaching. The average man, sad to relate, doesn't give himself to thinking much about Heaven or Hell. Let any preacher sit in the barber shop, sans clerical collar, and he'll get the full benefit of the kind of conversation taking place among men. If it should reach a religious overtone, like as not he'll hear something such as this being said:

"Well when you're dead, you're dead! That's all
there is to it."

Many people give the impression that they're not much interested in eternal life. A great theologian of our generation once said, sadly and wisely, "Ours is a generation for whom Hell has no terror, and Heaven no invitation." This is what's happening with people who bow God out of their thinking...shove Him to the periphery.....

...when you don't think of God, you don't think in
terms of eternal life...

...and when you don't think in terms of eternal life,
you don't think in terms of Judgment...

...and when you don't think in terms of Judgment,
you don't think in terms of Heaven...you don't

think in terms of Hell....

You simply go day by day, and when you are dead, said the man in the barber shop - - "you're dead!"

But you know what, I'm inclined to think that when people are together they put up a facade. When it comes to talking about the hereafter, when it comes to talking about God, when it comes to talking about Heaven and Hell and eternal life - - for any number of reasons they're not about to talk freely. But I would hazard an opinion, and I feel very strongly about it, that left to himself, a man in his solitude has deep thoughts about life and death... deep thoughts about Heaven or Hell, especially if he's had any kind of religious orientation at all. Let a man be by himself, or let him be by himself in the presence of the death of someone whom he loves, or in the presence of the death of someone that he should have loved more than he did, and you might get an entirely different story. Let a man speak to us out of his own solitude, and then he might give some indication that he is awed by the fact of death, and he is mystified and made silent by the possibility of judgment. He may put up a facade in the presence of other people, but let a man be found by himself, even in the presence of someone who is dying, and the testimony of his soul might be entirely different.

Daniel Webster, as some of you may know, was Secretary of State when Millard Fillmore was President of the United States of America. They were having a dinner party in his honor in the Astor House in New York City; some twenty friends were invited. A man who sat across the table from Daniel Webster noticed that he was becoming quite uncommunicative - - he was very much deep in thought. A peculiar kind of chap, he made bold to pierce into the mind of Daniel Webster, and he said to him, "Mr. Secretary, would you mind telling us the most important

single thought that ever went through your mind?"

...that's quite a thing to say
to a man in the presence of other people, because we're not
about to think in terms that are that profound...usually in
conversation we deal with trivial matters....

Daniel Webster, as the report has been given, rather softly said to the man who asked the question: "All of these people who are here -- do they know me? -- do they know me very well?" And the man replied to the Secretary of State, "Yes, Mr. Secretary, I am happy to report, we're all your friends."

Without saying anything else, Daniel Webster stood on his feet, and he said, "Alright, I will tell you, the most important single thing that ever has gone through my mind: My personal responsibility to Almighty God."

...now that's a bold thrust for a man to stand up,
even in the presence of twenty people, and to say, "The
thing that's on my mind", with the greatest severity, "is the
fact that I am a person being held responsible by God."

And the report as I've seen it in print says that Webster spoke for at least twenty minutes on that subject. And then without saying anything else, excused himself from the company and went to his own room for continued reflection and meditation.

There are people like that, and I dare say you're like that, because you have your moments when you see yourself as a responsible person in the sight of Almighty God. And when you and I see ourselves as being held responsible in the sight of God, we begin to think in terms of the time of Judgment -- when God then will put us to the test. For Judgment most certainly will come.

Well, we ask ourselves the question then, will we pass or won't we pass? Will we qualify or won't we qualify? Significantly enough, when our Blessed Lord was here on earth, He talked to His disciples about it. I want to talk to you about it this morning. In fact, the gist of this sermon deals with the fact of Judgment. Oh, I'll grant you that many people that I know and many people that you know attempt to ignore the fact of Judgment - - they won't allow themselves to believe that there's going to be a drawn line, and on one side will be God's Accepted and on the other side will be God's Rejected. There are times when they won't allow themselves to think in those terms. But I have news for you, my friend. Scripture won't allow you to be that way, and if you read Scripture at all, Scripture is always touching in this way or in that way upon the fact of Judgment.

And even when the creed-writer came on the scene, he put it so positively when he was referring to Jesus Christ. The creed-writers say, "He will come again - - "

...and to what end, and to what purpose?

- - "to judge."

Don't take my word for it. Take the word of Scripture, take the word of the creed-writer....take the word of Jesus Christ.

Matthew, in his 25th chapter, touches upon Judgment again and again, and that leads me to the text for this sermon, the 44th and the 45th verses of the 25th chapter of the Gospel according to Matthew:

"Lord - - "

(that's the question they put to Him when He was talking about Judgment)

" - - when did we see you hungry...thirsty...
a stranger....naked....sick or in prison, and

did not minister unto you?"

The reply of Jesus: "Verily I say unto you, inasmuch as you did not
do it unto the least of these my brethren,
you did not to it to me."

...He's talking about Judgment.

Now when He talks about Judgment, He gives us a standard for Judgment.
Ah, that's helpful, isn't it? How might we be expected to qualify, if we
are to be seen in the sight of God as responsible -- how can we pass the
test?

Well at first blush, what Jesus Christ had to say sounds quite simple.
You remember what He had to say, don't you? He talked about people who were
hungry -- and then somebody gave them something to eat....

...He talked about people who were thirsty -- and somebody
gave them something to drink...

...He talked about people who were ill-clad -- and somebody
gave them some clothing....

...He talked about people who were sick -- and somebody
came to visit them....

...He talked about somebody who was in jail -- and somebody
came to see them...

And Jesus said, "This is the Judgment -- whenever you have done these things,
you have done it to Me, and now you qualify."

Ah, that's wonderful, isn't it! We used to think that to qualify for
Heaven we had to know all about the creeds.....we had to be in church so many
times in the course of the year!....we had to support the Lord's work in a
specific way, with a certain amount of money!....we had to memorize Luther's

Catechism - - - these were the things that we thought were so terribly important, and I'm not minimizing their significance. But when Jesus talked about the acid test, He didn't mention any of these things. He said, "It's as simple as all this:

"If you have been good to someone, if you have met their needs, then you qualify."

How encouraging. That means all of us have a chance. It isn't a matter of station, it isn't a matter of culture, it isn't a matter of creed, it isn't a matter of class.....

.....and I suppose I can hear somebody pushing my back to the wall and saying, "Why you don't even have to be a Christian to qualify! - - according to what Jesus says as a standard of Judgment, as long as you have done good to somebody - - "

....so you and I begin to feel a bit more comfortable. It's an easy test! And anybody can meet it.

But I wish I could tell you that it is as simple as all that. Oh, I'm not backing up a bit. It's possible for all of us, but it may not be as simple as you think, because the words that Jesus Christ spoke need to be read carefully and deliberately. He said, "Inasmuch as you have done it unto one of the least - - "

Did it ever occur to you that when you and I are inclined to do good, we do it to those who are of our kind! - - we do it to those to whom it is easy to do good - - and we do the good that we do when it's convenient to us to do it. Oh, it isn't that we don't want to do good -- we're nobly intentioned, alright....but we do good according to our schedule and according to our con-

venience and according to our means.

Did it ever occur to you how much good some of us have done to satisfy our own egos! We even wait for the return mail for the kind thing that somebody is going to say to us because we did what we did. We almost wait with bated breath for people to say the nice thing about us, because of the good that we've done. . . .

. . . and all the while Jesus Christ, talking about the standard of Judgment, says, "But remember that -- to the least." - - "and if you have done it in My name - - " It's a rather frightening thing, then, to see how exacting the standard really is!

And how will you interpret the least? Why you interpret it this way: To those who need it most. It's too much to ask any person to sit through a sermon twice, but I wish now that when she went out the door this morning, when the sermon was being preached at 8:30, she had turned around to come back, to hear the sermon the second time. Because as she shook my hand she said, "And now where do you want me to go to look for the least?" To her credit at least, she wants to put the sermon into action. She's not going to put it off - - "But where will I find the least?"

Well translate it this way: Anybody who needs most what you are in a position to give. And you may not have to look beyond the confines of your own family circle! You may not have to go past the second house on the street where you live! So Christ gave us His standard for Judgment.

But there's another thing that needs to be said when you think of what He spoke about. He gave some indication that in the time of Judgment a man would pass or fail according to surprise testimony, because the surprise element was most certainly present. When Jesus talked about feeding the hungry and giv-

ing something to drink to the thirsty and clothing to the ill-clad and doing the visiting bit to those who were sick or in prison - - and when He says that when these things were done they were done to Him - - they were surprised by the answer that He gave when they found out they were those who had qualified, and they didn't know it.....and there were those who had failed to qualify, and they didn't know it! Surprise!

For to do something for God -- how do you do something for God? You do something for God by meeting the needs of His children! "As you do it for them you do it for Me" says Jesus Christ.

People - - you can't think of God without people...you can't think of people without God! Jean-Paul Satre had his own understanding of people. He said, "Hell is other people." - - they were a nuisance, they annoyed him, they irritated him, they stood in his way, as his character would have us to understand it. For Jesus Christ, other people become our opportunity by which to do something for God!

Do you remember how that Russian novelist put it? He tells how he went into the church one time, nobly intentioned if you please, and he wanted to see the face of Jesus Christ.....and all the time he was praying there went before him the parade of other people's faces, the sick and the diseased, the old and the young....and then the novelist has his character say, "I found His face, but it was a face like every other man's." So it could be in the time of Judgment that Jesus Christ may back us up against a wall, and say, "What have you done for Me?" - - and the only answer that may ever satisfy Him may be the answer that can be given in the terms of other people's needs that have been met.

But one final word. Happy indeed is that man whose soul is possessed by the mind and spirit of Jesus Christ. Happy indeed is that person who knows he's being redeemed by the love of Christ. Because it's the love of Christ and the love of Christ alone that can motivate us to meet the needs of other people. Unless a man is constrained by the love of Christ, he's going to run out of steam. Unless a man is constrained by the love of Christ - - "They're not worth saving - - they're not worth helping." If a man wants to get ready for Judgment, let him begin then by asking the love of Christ to possess his mind and his soul, and from that point on you'd be surprised how ready you can be made for the Day of Judgment that most certainly comes.

People who have visited Pompeii tell me that they are amazed to see what remains for the visitors of today. When the volcano erupted, people were encrusted immediately, at whatever they were doing. Suppose when the time of Judgement comes, we're going to be frozen, solidified, at the point where we happen to be. No wonder some people say: "Judgment is taking place every hour and every day!"

...and that's really something to think about!

* * * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded
- - a composite of the 9:45 and 11:15
sermons)

"ON GROWING OLDER"

Grace, mercy and peace from God
our Father and from His Son
Jesus Christ our Blessed Lord
be with you all. Amen.

It is not too much to say that this congregation is blessed in many ways. We are blessed particularly that as a congregation we are still comparatively young. We've barely hit 30, as you well know, since it was in January, 1940, that this congregation was organized. Yet this fact of being 31 and little more than that is quite a bit to swallow, for anyone especially who has just come back from overseas. For it's not at all unusual to worship in a congregation, either in England or in Europe, that has a history of 500 or 600 years.

But this morning we're not thinking alone of the fact that we're little more than 30 years old as a congregation. We are also grateful for the fact that many of our members are under 30 years of age....what do we say? -- 400 of them between the ages of twelve and twenty. They constitute a significant segment in the life and spirit of this congregation. One out of every three confirmed members in Saint Luke Church is well under thirty years of age, perhaps under twenty-five years of age. Our debt to them is very great. They bring a great deal of vitality, spirit and enthusiasm into the life of this parish.

Some of us readily recall what they did for us this past summer. We

called it "Summer in Saint Luke" -- they characterized it for us by their enthusiasm and their energy. Said the Parish Deaconess, who was spending her first summer with us as a staff member, "I've never seen anything like it -- no matter where I go, I'm bumping into young people!" They came night after night and day after day. They even spilled over beyond the confines of this parish. For three weeks they were on tour, some of them, invading one community after another, engendering good will in the name of Jesus Christ in their Tent Troupe . . .

...and then a group of them crossed north of the border, spending a solid week in a suburb of Montreal, in the name of Jesus Christ knocking on doors -- 10,000 by the time the week was over....handing to the pastor of the congregation up there enough names to more than double the enrollment of his Sunday School and church, granted he gets a good return on his prospects....to say nothing of the names that they gave to other congregations.... We are indebted to them for so much.

And do you know that as we plan for this service next Lord's Day, the unique service in Montgomery Blair auditorium, it was a teenager who made the attractive signs that you may have seen as you entered through one of the entrances leading to Saint Luke Nave.....it's a teenager who is making for us the candles that will be borne by the torch-bearers in procession....it's a teenager who is going to bake the homemade loaf of bread that symbolically will be placed upon the large altar in the altar area.....

But I have not come to this sacred desk simply to remind you what they bring to us. I have also come to remind you how great ~~and~~ their challenge is,

and how great is the responsibility that we have to those who are young. Three of our staff members, professionally trained, spend the greater part of their time in ministering to young people. The largest single segment of workers -- this staff of Christian Education lpeople -- invest most of their time and their energy touching those who are young.

Deserving as may be the salute that we can well afford to give to them, I come to this sacred desk, however, to recognize the debt that we owe to those who are our elder brethren. I cannot give you, right off the cuff now, the statistics that will tell you the number of people we have in Saint Luke Church who are 60 years of age and older -- 70 and 80 years and older. I can tell you, I think, that we have at least six who are 90 years of age. In the service that immediately preceded this one, at 9:45, the sermon was concluded by both of your pastors walking down into the aisle, about the third seat from the front, and recognizing there the presence of a charter member who on Wednesday of this week will celebrate her 90th anniversary of her birth, and in behalf of the entire congregation we surrounded her with our love and our prayers.....so we salute Eleanor Heindel.

One of our members is nearer 100 than 90. So all of this very naturally leads me to share with you the text, for a sermon entitled, "On Growing Older." And the text, it's the 4th verse of the 29th chapter of the Book of Job. And I'm warning you, when I read you the text, you'll say, "Preacher, you mis-spoke yourself -- you've made an error".....because more than one person, reading that text in the original and in the translation from the original, may scratch his head and say, "But that's wrong." But nonetheless, here's the way the text goes:

"O that I were in the days of my autumn."

Surely, you say to yourself, that isn't the way people respond! For the most part they say, O, that I were in the days of my youth! - Oh, to be young again!

In fact, there are some translators who are so impressed and imbued by this thought that when they translate this from the original, they simply accept the fact and say, "This is a mistake" - - and there are some translations of the Scripture that read, "O that I were in the days of my youth." But in the Hebrew, the original, the translation is this:

"O that I were in the days of my autumn"

...thanking God for the fact that I have lived long enough to reach maturity - - glad for the blessed truth.

Oh, I know how we talk. I say the same things, having reached the age that I've reached....."Oh, to be 30 again, with the drive and the dreams and the enthusiasm.".....but I temper that, honestly I do, even as I think you do - - "Oh, to be 30 again -- if at the same time I could have, readily available, some of the lessons that I've learned since 30!" And that makes a difference.

But be that as it may, here's Job, in that 29th chapter of the book that bears his name, the 4th verse - - grateful for the fact that he had reached the autumn-tide of life, and well he could be in that day. Cherish the thought, when he walked down the street there were those who stood up, and bowed their heads, in respect and veneration for one who had reached maturity. And when he spoke, as he recites in some of his chapters, people listened to him! - - and felt that he was giving wise counsel because the years had proven the validity of his experience.

I'm grateful that we're showing a renewed interest in China, for a number of different reasons. As one who is interested in history, I think I can say to you that China, perhaps as much as any nation on the face of the earth, has always had respect for its elders. And we who are of the Hebrew-Christian tradition know full well the high value that sacred writ places upon maturity -- one who is privileged to grow old in the grace of God. . . .

So Job, thinking of the autumn of life, said, "I thank God that I've reached it."

I want to salute the members of this congregation who are growing older. How great our debt is to you! When I think of those who are growing older, I think of Job, for as Job was growing older he could see the undeniable stamp of God upon the fabric of his life. And what's the purpose of growing older if God does not become increasingly real?

Don't misunderstand me, I would not short-change in any way the beautiful and innocent spiritual sensitivity of those who are young. As meaningful as any service of the Holy Communion, I think, that I have ever attended was the service of the Holy Communion I attended during the summer when I shared the Blessed Sacrament with a group of young people within the shadow of this altar.....and on occasion as I look back through the years and I remember how they came into this Nave, dimly lighted, in the first Sunday in Advent, and how one by one, a host of young people came up and found their way to the altar, and knelt individually as already indicated I would not short-change their spiritual sensitivity. It is a very precious and a very genuine thing. But at the same time I must also admit that for those who are enabled to grow older, there remains the undeniable stamp of God

upon the fabric of their lives. Life has proven to them the providence of God. They've lived long enough to know that His promises are kept.

Said an old man, a Hebrew at that -- you can read it for yourself in the Old Testament -- "I have been young, and now I am old. Never have I seen the righteous forsaken; never have I seen their seed going hungry." What is the purpose of growing older if it isn't that the undeniable stamp of God should be impressed upon us?

Surely by this time you know how I cherish that particular moment in this magnificent liturgy of the Church, to which we return Sunday after Sunday.....we've confessed our sins, we wait to hear that we're forgiven, and as you heard it this morning:

"The Almighty and merciful God grant unto you,
being penitent time for the amendment
of life "

Each new day comes as God's special gift, that growing older, we might live by God's truth and by God's love.

The second thing I can tell you that may come to those who are privileged to grow older is that, happy thought, they might have a little more time to do some of the things that matter most. At 25 - 30 - 35 - 40 -- the driving, the pressure, to get ahead, to get established. And every now and then, sad to relate, at the neglect of things that matter most. And if age teaches a man anything, it ought to teach him that there are some things that ought to have a priority as over against other things, and these should come in for receiving their rightful attention.

This is one reason why some of us would cherish the thought of growing older, that we might be able to make amendment for some of the stupidity, and the folly, and the unwisdom of other years. Granted you have your health and your strength and you're able to grow older, it could be that

you would discover that there is time to take care of the things that matter most, and to deal with them patiently, and by the grace of God, to deal with them wisely.

Children especially stand to benefit by the patient dealing of those who are older. Maybe this is one reason why God allows some people to grow older. I think I've told you this, when a gentleman who had been in India for two or three decades returned to the States, somebody said to him, "What does India need most?"....now you have to remember that in India most people don't live beyond 40 years of age.....quick as a flash the man who had lived there for two - three decades said, "What India needs most is grandparents"! And by that he included in one swell stroke all people who live beyond 50 or 60, that they might be able to exert the patient, compassionate influences upon those who are younger.

If you were to ask me what lessons I think I've tried to learn, still in the attempt to master them, as the years have unfolded my way, I think I'd have to admit in your presence, in all honesty, that I'm learning that practically any situation can be resolved, granted we don't run out of love, and we don't run out of patience. And maybe as one gets older he begins to realize how terribly, terribly important these things are. And what is it to love someone, if it isn't to be patient?

None of us knows what may lie ahead for any of us. After the preaching of the sermon at 9:45, one of the members of this congregation, in his 83rd year, came up to me and said, "But Pastor, my health is beginning to break" - - - and that was his lament and his confession to me. . . "I wish I could be all that I would like to be, even in my old age." It is a sad thing when one's health begins to break, and there is the deterioration of

the flesh, and perhaps of the mind as well. And all of that is simply to say that those of us who are a bit younger can well afford to deal patiently, and kindly, with those who have gone down the road farther than we, and have learned so much. If they had the health and the strength, they could call back, and teach us so much. "O that I were," said the wise man of the Old Testament, "in the days of my autumn."

"Brethren," wrote a wise man one day, "All of us have to face the autumn if we are granted room and time. Let no man dread it, if only God is in his heart and is his health and stay. Under Him, the autumn should be and is the day of fruit, the time of the yellow corn, the season of maturity and hope. But without God, or the presence and promise of Jesus Christ, I can well believe that I should dread the autumn more than death itself. For what is any man's autumn but a grim mockery, if there be no inner harvest?"

These are words that I've written down, and they're framed as they hand in my study. They set before me the goal that I would cherish, in whatever years that God would yet allow. I welcome you then, into this company, those of us who ask God for years yet to come. And if it be in His mercy, a generous portion of health and strength, to the end that we might always bring honor and glory to His holy name.

* * *

Meditation at Preparatory Services on Sunday
morning in anticipation of the Festival
Service of Holy Communion at Montgomery
Blair at 5:00 p.m. for Saint Luke Church

WHAT WITH, O GOD, the maddening pace
of which we must be part, we have so little
time to make adequate preparation for the
things that matter most. Perhaps right now,
just for a little while, we shall make ready.
Amen.

Some weeks back, just before we flew over to London, two days before,
in fact, I discovered that the camera that I had planned to take with me was
not working properly. A camera never has been an easy thing for me to
operate. So in my bewilderment I thought, what will I do now? It was Rudy
Schuetzler, a member of this congregation, who came to my rescue and offered
me his wife's camera. In about a half-hour's instruction period, he said,
"Take it - - you're on your own!" Then with film in hand, off we went,
clicking one picture after another, one roll after another. But I frankly
confess, all the time I was apprehensive, wondering if I had mastered this
camera correctly. Well, when we sent the film to the processing laboratory
after we returned, it was with some sigh of relief that I discovered that
most of the pictures had come out alright.

Not so my friend Harold Eskew, however. Harold tells me about a friend
of his who had looked forward to the time of his retirement. He had set
aside a certain sum of money for the trip of a life-time....they would visit
places that they had never seen before and would never again see. That, in
the sunset years of life he might be able to look at them repeatedly and re-
live the trip, he, too, had taken pictures. Camera in hand, off he went,
clicking...clicking....clicking. When he came back, he waited, too, for his

films to come back from the processing laboratory. Much to his chagrin and sorrow, not a single picture turned out well. He did not know it, but the camera which he had used, and which he had trusted, had a faulty focusing mechanism....no picture was in perfect focus, not a single one was clear. They were all imperfect.

I submit to you this morning that all of us who take the journey through life are having images recorded upon the fabric of our mind or of our heart. Wouldn't it be a lamentable thing if at journey's end it was revealed to us that we had never seen anything, or anyone, in clear and perfect focus as we had traveled along the road, that nothing had registered on us, clearly and perfectly and just as it truly was. This is a parable. For many people there are who come to journey's end, realizing that now that it's all over, only to discover by the light of God's truth, by the light of His perfect lens on the screen on which He projects all things in Judgment, that our picture is faulty, imperfect, out of focus.

This afternoon, my friend, we will be making a journey. If you were to go from Saint Luke to Montgomery Blair, it's less than three minutes away by auto...a short distance. But I'm suggesting that in that short distance that we take from this place to that time, that we consider the possibility that we get things in clear and proper focus . . .

- - who are we, who come to this place now?

- - who are we, who will be approaching the altar?

Man's great responsibility in life is to see himself as he is -- if you please, as he's focused upon by the lens of God. And what does God see

when God focuses upon us? According to the divine camera, what is the true and perfect image of man?

Some years ago I sat, on a Sunday afternoon, with a group of people in the quiet of the hills of home as the people discussed the fate of the world. There were some very important people in that gathering, renowned educators, people who are highly conversant with the things of the world, have traveled a great deal. And this man said this was wrong with the world, and this man said something else was wrong with the world. And then old Uncle Reuben spoke up. Uncle Reuben was an old man, bent by the years. You could see the lines on his face. Feebly he spoke. He said, "The trouble with the world is that we're all a bunch of sinners -- we're heading for Hell."

I don't know that very many people in that group heard Uncle Reuben say that. Not very many people listen to that kind of talk even if they do hear it. But I reasoned to myself as I reflected upon that experience, if you'll allow me to picture it this way . . .

...God is like an old man...when God looks down upon our world, God says, "I know what your trouble is -- you're a bunch of sinners, that's what you are!"

...that was the sad truth that was revealed to God when He looked down upon us a long time ago. That's the way God sees us. And when God looked down upon us and got us in clear and sharp focus, He even found out the way we were headed -- we were headed straight for Hell. And God said to Himself, "But I didn't make My people to go to Hell. They are traveling in the wrong direction!" We're a bunch of sinners, Hell-bent.

God happened to remember how He made us, you see - - we might forget, but God doesn't. God says, "I made you a little lower than the angels - - I crowned man with glory and honor - - I made him in My likeness -- I made him to respond to Me....that's what I did."

So God says, "They're Hell-bent, they're traveling the wrong way -- I'll come to them Myself - - I'll take the initiative!"so God comes to us in the form of Jesus Christ. And Jesus Christ, who is the Eternal Pilgrim, the perpetual pilgrim, the constant companion, finds us along the way, the way that says NO EXIT.....the way that says DEAD END. Whether we realize it or not, Jesus Christ taps us on the shoulder and He says, "Turn around, man - - follow Me! I am the Way, the Truth and the Life. You're a sinner. You're Hell-bent" This is what Jesus Christ came to tell us. This is the way God reasoned when He looked down upon us. This is the way the transparencies came out when they were processed in the divine laboratory.

But wouldn't it be a terrible thing if all the preacher of God had to tell you was this, that you're simply a bunch of sinners! That isn't all the preacher has to tell you. Oh, he has to tell you that, but that isn't all he has to tell you. He has to tell you also that Jesus Christ comes to us along the way, and turns us around, if we will let Him . . . and guides us in the path of the forgiven. Now, this is the picture that you and I must see of ourselves, clearly and perfectly, as we approach the altar of the Lord this afternoon: Sinners who are being forgiven.

The most wonderful thing about man is that he can respond to God. The most wonderful thing about man is that he doesn't have to self-destruct. The wonderful thing about man is, by the grace of God he's redeemable. But he has to respond.

But one of the terrible things about man is that he can't respond on his own. It's even the Holy Spirit, the work of God, that is at work within us to get us to become aware of the fact that God is calling us, that' it's the gentle pressure of God's hand upon our shoulder, that Jesus Christ is tenderly and patiently calling us: "Come home -- this way, not that way!" In order to do that, we need to respond, turn all the way around, become converted, as we're forgiven. But for this to happen, even, God has to take the initiative. The Text for this brief meditation is what the Apostle Paul had to say when he reflected upon this truth, in the 8th verse of the 5th chapter of his Epistle to the Christians who lived at Rome:

"But God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."

Can you imagine a love as great as that! - - even while we were still sinning, God takes the initiative! God says, I'm going to do something about it right now, so that when they will turn around, everything will be signed, sealed and delivered. God's love is so great that even while we were still sinning, Christ was dying upon the Cross. All that a man has to do is respond - - and right there is the pronouncement of forgiveness of God - - it is immediately operative. One doesn't have to wait. It is God who takes the initiative.

How different from the way you and I act! Oh, I know what you say -- I have said it myself: "Let him show himself sorry...let him come to me... ..let him ask to be forgiven, and I will forgive him. But not until he comes will I forgive." God points His finger at us and He says, "For shame! You know human nature! You know how people box themselves in a

corner! You know what a binding thing pride can be! It isn't easy for people to come and ask to be forgiven." God says, "I know that. So why don't you do what I've done," says God, "You take the first step -- you forgive them, in order that they might repent!

Hear me and hear me out, my friend. If the God who is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ were not like that, some of us would never have the hope of Heaven. That's just how stubborn we are in our sinfulness and wickedness. But God's love is so great that even though, and while we are yet sinners, Christ went ahead and died for us, in order that when we turn, forgiveness should be made immediately. So get yourself in clear and proper focus, my friend, according to the lens of God. We'll be gathering around the Table of the Lord -- now with great joy in your hearts. For if you are truly contrite, then you are the forgiven! This is the wonderful message of the Christian Gospel: You're a sinner, but a sinner loved by God, for whom Jesus Christ has paid the price of eternal redemption.

By the way, do you know, the only person who ever gets to Heaven is the person who wears the name-tag and the label of the forgiven! But forgiveness, to be made effective and operative, has to be accepted. God may offer it, but it's never completed until we accept it.

I remember the first sermon I heard the Assistant Pastor of this congregation preach from this sacred desk. He used an illustration that I share with you now that I hope, as God gives me memory, I will never forget. The illustration was: That during one of the wars in the history of our nation, I've forgotten which war it was, a young sentry had fallen asleep at his post of duty. And because he fell asleep, the enemy was able to do

his terrible deed. He was sentenced to life imprisonment.

He had a mother who pleaded for him, and asked for mercy. The plea reached the President of the United States at that time. The President of the United States, his heart was softened, and he granted a pardon.

But for some strange reason, that I've never been able to figure out and that I can't give you now, that sentry, sentenced to death, refused to accept the pardon. His mother in her own behalf took the plea to the Supreme Court.....and the Supreme Court said he could not be pardoned, he would be condemned to death, as long as he refused to accept the pardon. Isn't that a terrible thought!

God, who waits to forgive, God who has signed, sealed and delivered the forgiveness, would have to step aside, if we should prefer not to accept what God offers. Now see yourself in clear and proper focus. . .

...we've come here this morning

...we've confessed our sins. If we believe with a contrite heart, we are pronounced forgiven. That means we approach the

Altar of the Lord, then, with the joy of those who are being redeemed. That's why I'd like to hazard an opinion right now: with all my soul I believe, because this is true, what's going to happen this afternoon around the Table of the Lord will be like a bit of Heaven.

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"THE TRUE PEACEMAKER"
(Matthew 5:9)

MAKE US, O GOD, of one mind and
spirit, preacher and listener
alike, that even now Thy word of
truth may come to us. Amen.

They've torn down the old Reformed Church on the main street in Selinsgrove, and hard by they're building a brand new structure. Now that probably won't mean a thing to most of you. For one reason, seldom if ever might you get up that way, and if you did, because you don't have roots in that section, you'll simply pass by, hardly noticing the fact at all.

But when I pass by the site of the dismantled structure, and realize that a new unit is going up alongside of it, my mind goes back to a number of years ago when a Pennsylvania Dutchman by the name of Arbogast taught the adult Bible class in the old Reformed Church. And when people in Selinsgrove talked about old man Arbogast, particularly if they were members of his Sunday School class, they were present on any Sunday morning, they might nudge the fellow alongside him and say, "Now watch it -- it will happen before it's over -- I'll just bet it will!"....because Old Man Arbogast had a habit, no matter what the subject of the Sunday School lesson was, of getting around to the theme of either the Holy Spirit, or the Devil. They were his two pet subjects, and he never allowed a group

of people to be in front of him without his speaking about them.

I also recall how some of the students at the University at Susquehanna remembered that this could be a failing of certain professors. It was the habit in those days -- I don't know how it is now -- but occasionally a professor would give an oral quiz, when the class would gather, in order, of course, to ascertain how well they had mastered the material that had been assigned. And one of my friends, I recall him very well, would pride himself in the fact that when it came his turn to answer a question, he would deliberately divert the professor's attention by asking him a question on the subject that was very dear to his heart.....and that's all that it would take. And from that moment on my student friend would rest a bit easier, as he sidetracked the professor on his special pet subject.

In case you don't know it, preachers have to be on guard when they return to a pulpit with regularity, lest they subject the congregation to their own pet subject and theme, or text. It's a hazard to which all of us could succumb. But that's one reason why some of us preachers deliberately plan our preaching schedule a year in advance, so that in doing that we can bring some semblance of balance, not only to the selection of text but also the treatment of the theme.

Now having said all of that, I am constrained to tell you right now, that when our Blessed Lord was here on earth, and He went about preaching and teaching, He had His own pet subject that was very important to Him. And ever so often, no matter what the occasion might have been, He'd talk about it. Have you any idea just what it was to which Jesus Christ would

refer again and again and again?

When God looked down from Heaven above and took a good long look at this troubled world of ours, it didn't take Him much of a while to come to the conclusion that our basic trouble was this: we just hadn't mastered the art of living with one another. Here and there were estranged relationships. There was discord among people....there was discord within a man's own soul. For more than one wise man has said, within every single one of us there's a civil war that's waging constantly. And of course God in Heaven above knew very well that there was discord between man and his Creator, a lack of harmony between God and us. So God sent Jesus Christ here on earth to do His thing, to accomplish His purpose.

And how did He go about it? Remember it and remember it full well. He began by choosing twelve people, and the Scriptural account says that He chose them that they might be with Him. And so for about a period of three years they were in close relationship with Him. They did a number of things together, they walked familiar paths, they were constantly being exposed to His mind and to His spirit. They were always within earshot when He was saying something to somebody. Then after those three years had run their course, He who had called them to be with Him now sends them out, and He says, "You go out into the world -- you can never be withdrawn from it -- you are meant to be part of the world, you must live in the world. And the world is going to learn a lesson from you, just by the way you live with one another."

One day when He was preaching a great sermon that's known as The Sermon on the Mount, He went on from one subject to another. But he did

pull out all the stops when He came to talk about those who had been called to be with Him, and to those who would follow in His footsteps. He said, "Of all the people on the face of the earth - - "

(I'm paraphrasing, of course I am)

" - - of all the people on the face of the earth, you're going to be the truly happy ones. You're going to be the truly blessed ones - - because you're going to be the peacemakers."

...and that's the text for this sermon, the 9th verse of the 5th chapter of the Gospel according to Matthew, which is part of the Sermon on the Mount:

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for
they shall be called the children
of God."

When our Blessed Lord used that figure of speech, He was saying, of course, that people who make peace reflect the true nature and character of their Heavenly Father, and that's why they're fit to be called the children of God. Jesus Christ kept referring to the theme again and ever so often. It's a matter of record that when He offered His last High Priestly Prayer, He prayed for His disciples that they might always be one, and that they might be at peace with one another. And do you know what His last will and testament really is? -- the last thing that Jesus Christ gave to us? - -

...you'll find those words, significantly enough, carved over the entrance to the main door of Saint Luke Church. The next time you come through the red doors, look up and read

for yourself these words in the stone arch:

MY PEACE I GIVE UNTO YOU

So well did He establish this theme that the letters in the New Testament that followed, as they were being sent out to Christian communities in Asia Minor, for the most part begin and end with these words: "Peace be unto you." The anthem that was sung during this service indicates man's longing for the bestowal of peace upon him. And every service now that we conclude in Saint Luke congregation, when the Benediction is pronounced, ends with the assurance of the bestowal of God's peace.....so great is the longing of the human heart for peace.....so great is God's desire to have peace in our hearts.

"Blessed, " said Jesus Christ, "are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God." Now a word of caution immediately. Jesus Christ, realist that He was, does not say 'blessed indeed are those who love peace.' A peace-lover is not essentially the same as a peacemaker. Any number of people love peace. From the limited amount of traveling that I've done in different parts of the world, as I try to put my finger upon the spiritual pulsebeat of their hearts, I'm convinced that there is a hankering on their part after peace! Very few people that we ever meet want to tear us to shreds. Like as not, they want to live at peace with us.

But the problem is not that men should not want peace. The problem is that there aren't enough of us who want the things that make for peace! And we don't quite know how to go about this business of making peace. "Blessed," said Jesus Christ, "is the peacemaker"!

Now to be a peacemaker is something entirely different from being a person who has an irenic temperament. Some of us want very much to have peace and harmony among people, but if we're not on guard, we fail to recognize that simply wanting to have peace and harmony may not always be enough, because this can lead one to a passive stance, where he says nothing, and he does nothing, just because he doesn't want to become a disruptive force. And there are times and seasons when perhaps something needs to be said and something needs to be done -- aggressively so! -- in order that peace might be guaranteed.

I'm convinced that there are only two kinds of people, if one wants to categorize, in this world -- troublemakers and peacemakers. And a man ought to sit down every now and then and search his own soul and find out which type of person he really is. The lamentable thing about some troublemakers is that they make trouble and they don't realize they're making trouble. It's the way they deal with subtleties...it's the peculiar kind of nuances....it's the kind of question that they ask about a person...it's the tone in the voice. I have sat down in some meetings where as soon as one person has entered, an air of disruption was ushered into the room. There are people like that! -- and sometimes they never quite intend to be like that, but it can happen.

Sometimes it happens quite deliberately, where a person is laid hold upon by diabolical influences and will say, "I'll fix him!" -- and they never quite give up until they 'cook his goose.' There are people right now within hearing of my voice who can visualize certain faces, who work where you work, who day by day cause disruption. How different the situa-

tion would be if you could be free from that troublemaker!

How does one become a peacemaker? I think first of all he has to be at peace with himself. He has to be a whole person. In our trip this past summer, Ethel Anderson made the comment about a particular person that she knew, and I thought she phrased it magnificently, she said, "That person seems to be very comfortable with herself." More than one poet has said that we're constantly at war within one another. Studdert Kennedy, bless his soul, an English preacher, used to introduce the cockney soldier in many of his sermons as Exhibit A as to how he responded to situations. In this case it was the cockney soldier who was involved in the Great War, and John Bull was making every chap who marched off to war a kind of hero....and yet the padre who was his chaplain kept telling him he was a hell-deserving sinner. Well this is the way Studdert Kennedy put it:

"Our padre says I'm a sinner,
And John Bull says I'm a saint,
And they're both of them bound to be liars,
For neither of them, I ain't.
I'm a man, and a man's a mixture,
Right down from his very birth,
For part of him comes from heaven,
And part of him comes from earth.
There's nothing in him that's perfect - -

...so some people lie down on psychiatrist's couch, trying to have some word spoken that will help integrate and make them at peace with themselves.

Some of us keep coming back to this place, that we might hear the words of the officiating minister who in God's name says to us -- "Your sins....they're forgiven." And when some of us hear that, we're possessed by a measure of peace. Well, a man can't be a peacemaker until he's first

at peace with himself.

And a man can't be a peacemaker until he's first at peace with God. And this is always our situation, you see. We are estranged from God because we are sinners, and God takes the initiative and God says, "I know your situation and that's why I've come to you. I'll take the first step." And in this whole business of peace-making, the peacemaker always has to take the first step. Somebody has to initiate it, somebody has to make the overture. There are homes that remain in the misery of hell because no one will take the first step....no one will make the gracious overture. And what is it to be gracious except to give the undeserved thing!

Well, you may take your choice, my friend. We're either one of two kinds of people: troublemakers, or peacemakers. I don't know a worse thing that could be said of anybody than to be said that he's a troublemaker. I don't know of anything more blessed, and I have the authority of Jesus Christ for it, than to say of a person that he's a peacemaker.

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"THE COMMON MERCIES"

OURS IS the day, O God, of din and confusion. There are so many voices that we hear coming at us. But every now and then it's only one voice that we need to hear most. Perhaps even now in this place the voice that could be heard, frail and feeble as it may be, might be an echo of the Eternal Voice. Until we hear it, we shall remain confused. Amen.

It was the night before last that I stopped by their house. I arrived just as they were engrossed in the highly emotion-packed television drama. Coming into it well after it was begun, I can tell you little about it except the initial scene to which I was exposed....

...he was referred to, this character, affectionately, as "T.L." -- a medical student who was now serving his internship in a hospital in the ghetto section of the city. He had done a hard day's work. He was eager to get home to his wife and to share the solitude that they could experience beyond his own door.....

...but as he was going down the corridor of the hospital, he was called to by one of the patients who couldn't sleep. As he enters the room, he discovers that the patient is pouring out upon anyone who might hear, and now particularly it's the intern, something of the venom of his soul. For life had dealt him a series of tragic blows.

...as I remember, he recited some of them. And my initial impression was - - - how sad! -- that yours should be the inescapable burden. He was caught up by what he said in one swell stroke...as he had gone on to recite all the terrible things that had been his lot:

" - - and is this the way life is to turn out!"

His anguish left a dent upon my heart. And I'm inclined to think that even with his dying breath, he might curse life. And maybe you would too! -- if yours had been his unfortunate plight. For there are people * to whom life seems to deal one bad blow after another. They're left by the side....broken, bruised and bleeding.

But against that kind of background, I've come to raise a voice this morning which is the echo of another man's voice, who also cried out to anybody who might hear him. He had something to say. And in his case he wanted God especially to hear him. His words, which constitute the text for this sermon, are a prayer. You'll find them recorded in Holy Writ as the 15th verse of the 51st chapter of that whole Book of Psalms -- Psalm 51, verse 15 . . .

I warn you: in advance, a very unusual kind of prayer. ...most of the praying that you and I do is the kind of a prayer that complains to God, because God hasn't done what we thought He should have done....or people haven't done what we think they should have done. A great deal of our praying is complaining -- parading before God the ills of other people and the ills of life.....

....or if we don't come in a complaining way, we come in a begging

way, asking God to see fit to smile upon us, and to deal graciously with us.

Not so this prayer. It's a different kind of prayer:

"O Lord, open thou my lips, and my mouth
shall show forth thy praise."

...it's the prayer of a man who comes to God and he knows that God deserves thanks, and he knows his own condition well enough, calloused as it may be, that he might not be inclined to thank the God who is worthy of praise. And so he's asking God to get at work inside his own soul, to motivate him to give thanks to God. Now that's quite a prayer!

Each of us, I suppose, carries along with him through life the impressions of childhood. We reach a certain period in life and we look back as far as we can and try to remember what there was back in the recesses of those early days that did leave a mark upon us. For myself, I frankly admit in your presence, one of those things that I hold back from those earlier days, it's holding on to the hand of my mother and going nearby to visit a neighbor....

...and as we entered her house, I could smell the molasses cookies in the oven. The good neighbor of course recognized the look on my face, and before long she had reached the kitchen table for one of the cookies recently baked, still warm, and put it in my hand. ...eagerly it went to my lips. I can still feel the pressure of my mother's hand upon my shoulder -- "haven't you forgotten something?".....

Many of us never say 'thank you' unless the gentle prodding comes from somebody else to remind us. More than one woman takes her husband to task and says, "Now isn't it about time that you write that letter of thanks to so-and-so?" In my files I have a precious note from a teenager who said, as he wrote me, "I was scarcely out of the anaesthesia until my mother said, "Now don't you forget to write so-and-so and thank him!"

....because man is the way he is, he needs this constant prodding.

David the Psalmist recognized his own nature: "O Lord, you ought to be thanked, you deserve to be thanked -- open my lips so that I might do it." When that grand and good soul who came into our life and left his gracious influence here for other people who might rise up and call him blessed, Elwood DeLong -- in the autumn of his life, when he designed for us so many exquisite touches here in the Nave and brought that same beautiful touch to the Chapel of the Grateful Heart -- a firm believer in symbolism and in color.....

..the Chapel of the Grateful Heart, small as it may be, is chock-full of symbols. Not always noticed are the symbols at the end of each pew, the symbols in the windows. One that nobody ought to miss is the symbol at the center of the beam, at the crossing over the chancel step in the Chapel of the Grateful Heart. It's the symbol for the Holy Spirit, much like the symbol for the Holy Spirit that you find here at the highest point in the Nave -- the symbol that Mr. DeLong wanted so much to have placed there....it's the dove descending from Heaven with fire in his mouth, about to breathe into man.....indicative of the fact

that God inspires us with life, God inspires us with goodness, God breathes into us His grace.

Martin Luther did it so well in his explanation of the Third Article of the Creed, in which he points out for us that it's the Holy Spirit that draws us together, inspires us and motivates us. You and I would never be able to thank God if it weren't for the fact that God Himself gets at work inside us and prompts us and motivates us - -

"O Lord, open thou my lips, and my mouth
shall show forth thy praise."

This is the text that prompts recognition today as we mark the Festival of the Harvest. We can well afford to mark the Festival of the Harvest in this suburban congregation. One might say that less than 5% of the people of this congregation have vegetable gardens. How few among us right now can visualize the tilling of the soil, the weeding of the rows, the gathering of the peas and the beans and the carrots and the red beets and the tomatoes and the lettuce -- garden-fresh? The church does well to include in its schedule the Festival of the Harvest, because the harvest always reminds us of the mercies of God. And God Himself at harvest time prompts us to recognize that it is by His hand that we are sustained - - otherwise we might be blind to the mercies of God.

John Arnold, bless his soul, wrote one time, "The world has seen the passing of many civilizations, but the harvest, which God ordained before any of them, has outlasted them all. The world has seen many wicked men, but the sun and the rain have not ceased to fertilize their fields. So the love of God endures through all time and all evil. Nothing can stop Him from expressing it. The seed-time and the harvest constantly remind us that it is by the Lord's hand that we are provided." Maybe we need on

an occasion like this to say to God: "Open my eyes, open my lips, that I might see, that I might speak the praise of God." These are the common mercies of life.

I for one continue to regret the day that we passed from a pastoral civilization to an urbanized one. I think there were many lessons taught when at each springtime men thought in terms of tilling their own back yard, sowing their own seed in their vegetable gardens, and then having to wait patiently until God accomplished His work in due season. Men who went out and looked at their garden, and field too, had their eyes opened to what I refer to now as the common mercies of God.

But almost with such calloused indifference you and I unwrap a package of bread.....and almost thoughtlessly sit down to eat a meal....

"O Lord, open thou my lips . . ."

ought to be the prayer of prayers that man offers, that he might give thanks to Almighty God.

Oh, I know why it is. Man's a very clever thing -- ingenious, creative, skillful and productive. What can't he do these days? It's so easy to blot God out of the picture when man thinks how busy his own hands are. But you and I constantly run the risk of becoming insensitive to the common mercies of life.

I'm grateful today for what happened to me yesterday. It may not mean much to you, but I frankly admit it means a great deal to me . . . a five-year-old and his father were tidying up their back yard, and as I passed by where he was, he called out and he said, "Wait!"....and then with his own tiny hand he plucked an ordinary weed that looked like a flower. I would never have given it a second look.....the eyes of a child beheld the common

mercy of God.

God's always surrounding us with many things that bear His imprimatur, that have His sign. But we're blind to them. Did you ever recognize the inherent value of just the words that we use? The other morning when some of us met at Bethany, a group of men for breakfast and Bible study, we were studying the miracle of the blind beggar, Bartimaeus. Quite parenthetically in our discussion, we said if we had to give up one of our faculties, if we had to be denied speech, or sight, or hearing -- which would be the last thing we'd want to have taken away from us?

For four weeks my aging mother has been denied the faculty of speech. It is a traumatic thing to stand alongside of someone who can't so much on her own, without the nurse's or the surgeon's touch, formulate a single syllable.

This text for this sermon is unusually meaningful for me because a prince of the pulpit of the Lutheran Church once used it. He was an artist with words. He loved words. He placed a high value upon them because they became the means for him of communicating the Gospel of Jesus Christ. He was stricken with a strange affliction...for weeks and months he couldn't speak, he couldn't go back to his pulpit. You can imagine how fairly awe-struck his congregation was when he returned to his pulpit, from which he had been silenced for what seemed to be an interminable period in his life, and they listened as he read his first text, as he preached his first sermon:

"O Lord, open thou my lips, and my mouth
shall show forth thy praise."

We are surrounded by the common mercies of life. Maybe we ought to first fall upon our knees and ask God to open our eyes that we might see them, to open our lips that we might give Him thanks for themfor in the final analysis this must be said - - you and I receive more from life than we ever give. It's Holy Writ for it, I tell you -- you can find it on the sacred page:

"What have we that we have not received?"

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

(to be attached to R.S. sermon for 10/17/71)

John Arnold:

"The world has seen the passing of many civilizations; but the harvest, which God ordained before any of them, has outlasted them all. The world has seen many wicked men; but the sun and the rain have not ceased to fertilize their fields. So the love of God endures through all time and all evil; nothing can stop Him from expressing it."

"Joses, the brother of Jesus, was only a worker in wood,
And he could never see the glory that Jesus,
his brother could.

'Why stays He not in the workshop?' He often used to
complain.

'Sawing the Lebanon cedar, imparting to woods their
stain?

Why must He go thus roaming, forsaking my father's
trade,

While hammers are busily sounding, and there is gain
to be made?'

Thus ran the mind of Joses, apt with plummet
and rule,

And deeming whoever surpassed him either a knave
or a fool - -

For he never walked with the prophets of God's
great garden of bliss,

And of all the mistakes of the ages, the saddest,
methinks, was this - -

To have such a brother as Jesus, to
speak with Him day by day,

And never to catch the vision which
glorified His clay!"

Prayer - Pastor David Shaheen
October 17, 1971 - Festival of the Harvest

O GOD, Lord of all good life, Help us to have in our lives those things without which we cannot live. We have been reminded of your bountiful goodness through the fruits of the field that come from the seed-time and the harvest.

HELP US, O GOD, also to have the blessings of the fruits of the spirit which make our life complete.

O HEAVENLY FATHER, Help us to be loyal to our friends, so that they may be certain that we will never let them down, to be true to our loved ones so that we may be faithful to them through all the chances and changes of life;

Help us to be considerate in our homes, that we may be as sensitive to the feelings of others as we would have them to be to ours, conscientious in our work, that we can ~~have~~ bear the scrutiny of the eye, not of any human master, but of Yours.

Help us to be decent in our pleasures, so that we may never find delight in anything that would harm ourselves or any other person.

O GOD, Help us to give to our parents the honor which is their due, to our children the example which we owe them, to our brother the light which leads him to goodness and saves him from error.

O GOD, Help Your Church, to have for people that love which will show all men that we are Your disciples. Help us in our business, our trade or our profession to live by the standards of Christian religion and never to lower them;

Help us on the streets of men so to behave that we will never bring discredit on the name that we bear.

O GOD, Help us in our speaking to be honest and clean, so that no false and no evil word may soil our lips...in our thoughts kind and pure, so that we may ever think the best of others, that no evil thought may stain our mind.

O LORD, Open thou our lips, that our mouths may show forth thy praise.

OUR FATHER . . .

"ON BEING GOOD FOR SOMETHING"

THROUGH JESUS CHRIST, Thy
Son, our Lord. Amen.

Some of you here this morning may have to jog my memory a bit, because I'm dealing with something that I only vaguely recall. Wasn't there a time, some 14 or 15 years ago, when in one of our Sunday School departments we had what was known as the Banner Class standard? It was a standard on which there was a pennant that simply read: BANNER CLASS.

And didn't that pennant float around from Sunday School class to Sunday School class, in that particular department, and there it would remain, by that class, as long as it continued to maintain its certain standing, a standing which it achieved, perhaps, by having more youngsters in that particular class faithful to attending on that Sunday than on any other Sunday, perhaps against any other class in the department?....

...or it may have been that they got their recognition
because most of the boys and girls in that class had
memorized the assigned verse . . . ?

Well, the standard is gone. I don't quite know where it is. I am certain that I haven't seen it for at least a dozen years. It's gone by the board.

Presumably, as in some Sunday Schools, the old-fashioned tickets have gone by the board - - remember them? -- those little tickets with little pictures on them, and Bible verses, and you got one each time you came to Sunday School....and if you came ten times, and you got ten tickets, then that entitled you to a bigger ticket, wouldn't it.....and you had so many

big tickets and then you got, of course, a Bible book, or even a Bible....

...and how about those pins and bars -- remember them? -- the recognition that you received because you were faithful in attendance and achieved a particular standing...all of this in recognition, all of this by way of reward, because of something that you'd not failed to do.

Well, there were people who told us that this wasn't the thing to do, that a boy or girl ought to come to Sunday School for the sheer love of learning the Scriptures, that when a person came to Sunday School, he didn't come because he was going to get a reward.

Well it's all gone by the board, and I dare say -- now you may make of this whatever you want to make of it -- it's gone by the board along with the decline in Sunday School attendance. We even listen to those voices that came to us so well that some of us developed a dislike for certain hymns in the old Sunday School song book...we said we ought not to sing those songs that reminded us about the reward we'd get in Heaven "In the Sweet Bye-and-bye". In fact, they said, far better a man ought to school his own soul on words such as these, incidentally they do constitute a favorite hymn of mine...listen to these two stanzas:

"How can I choose but love thee, God's dear Son,
O Jesus, loveliest, and most loving One!
Were there no heaven to gain, no hell to flee,
For what thou art alone I must love thee.

Not for the hope of glory or reward,
But even as thyself hast loved me, Lord,
I love thee, and will love thee and adore,
Who art my King, my God, for evermore. "

This is it, they said -- you love God just because He happens to be the kind of God that He is! -- not because you're going to get anything out of loving Him.

Well, I have not come to this sacred desk this morning to plead a cause for re-establishing in the modern-day Sunday School a system of awards. That I would leave easily to other people. But I have come to this sacred desk to remind you that the principle of duty-and-reward is something that ought not to be ignored. In the practice of the Christian religion we are in duty bound to think of the fact that there are some things that do come later on, as a result of certain things that have happened before.

I sing the praise of certain parents that I know, who daily discipline their children, who make it a business to see that there's a pat on the back when a thing has been done in the way it should have been done, who know how graciously to speak the encouraging word, for most of us hunger for recognition. And most of us enjoy doing something if we know that it's going to win approbation. Certainly a man doesn't want to be condemned and discouraged just because he's done what's right. The other side of the coin is, he profits by the encouraging word that ought to follow something done well.

By the same token, when something's been done that should not have been done, a youngster ought to be taught early that there's a price to be paid for misbehavior or for negligence, or for recklessness. And what is such discipline except a system of its own or reward and recognition.

There's a text for this meditation. It's the 2nd verse of the 12th chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews. It's a reference specifically to Jesus Christ. It may surprise you a bit that when you study this text you'll discover for yourself that Jesus Christ allowed His life to be ordered by the prospect of certain things that were still ahead! - - certain things that

most certainly would come to pass, just because He endured faithfully.

Here's the text:

" - - who for the joy that was set
before him endured the cross, despising
the shame, and is seated at the right
hand of the throne of God."

Dare you and I believe this about Jesus Christ? - that Jesus Christ, when the chips were down, ordered His life and remained faithfully, and ~~am~~ endured patiently what had to be endured because all the time He was keeping His eye upon something beyond Calvary's brow. Well at any rate, that's the way this writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews has it -- that's the way he saw it! That's the way he believed it had to be said to a bunch of Christians who were second-generation group of Christians.

The early ones, who had some kind of a first-hand acquaintance with Jesus Christ or the disciples, had pretty well passed from the scene. And now you had this second-generation coming along, and they weren't so sure in their own minds it was worth the effort of trying to be Christian in a world that was always working against them. So in plain unvarnished language, the writer of the Epistle says:

"- - think in terms of Jesus Christ! - - keep Him uppermost in your mind! It was because of the joy that was set before Him that He endured the cross. He despised the shame, of course He did, and now He sits at the right hand of God - - - this is where He is now, only because prior to all of this He endured!"

Now that's something else, isn't it? -- sticking with a thing -- grit-

ting one's teeth, and with determination standing by it.

Does religion exact this from a man? Does the religion of Jesus Christ preach and teach us that there are certain things that ought to be done just because they ought to be done, out of a sense of duty? Of course it does! But I wouldn't give much for any congregation that didn't have a pastor who kept laying in front of his people certain obligations that could not be ignored in the practice of the Christian religion.

When I first came your way, and had my first introduction to suburbia, there were some people, whether fairly or unfairly, warned me and said, "- but you'll find suburbanite Christians convenience Christians"

...they'll get to church if it's convenient to do so

...they'll support a program if it's convenient to do so

...they'll worship on Sunday if the schedule is a

convenient schedule

...honestly, that's what they told me.

I promise you, take my word for it, I'm not at all being cynical, but my conscience on occasion is pricked when somebody says to me:

"What would happen to your attendance out at Saint Luke if somehow your four parking lots were abolished over-night? -- and people had to walk maybe three blocks to get to church, especially on a day as unpleasant as this -- how many might come?"

I don't quite know the validity of a charge like that. I'm troubled of course that a person should even think of it. I do know something about the record, however. I know that we have one family that travels

90 miles on any given Sunday that they come to worship -- 45 miles one way!

And they make the effort.....

...I know this morning at 8:30 when the choir sang, there were youngsters who had gotten up well before 7:00 o'clock and gotten their parents up, I may quickly add, in order to keep their obligation with the Martin Luther Singers that sing regularly at 8:30 in the morning, come the Lord's Day.....

But be that as it may, suppose it does require gritting the teeth and with some determination grimly going about fulfilling one's obligation in the Lord's name - - - dare we believe that this should and does happen? Of course! Because eventually we may learn that there are some things worth doing, worth paying the price, because of what happens.

Again and ever so often I remind myself that those who are young growing up in this parish can well afford to have their parents make the extra effort to enable them to take advantage of their opportunities, because some day in years to come they'll look back and they'll remember. You see, today is always the time out of which the precious memories of tomorrow are being fashioned. Today, you see, is always the time when we're making the investment upon which we draw in the years that are most certain to come. I give it to you on good authority, my friend. When God in Heaven above was seeing that the Children of Israel were developing and growing as a nation, what was His first tack, what was His first approach? As they were being fashioned as a nation, what did He do? He laid in front of them a series of obligations, a schedule of duties -- This you do! This you do not do!and all because He knew that one day they might look back and remember that it was worth the

effort, to endure, because tomorrow would come.

So I would not have anyone minimize the significance of laying before people obligations and asking them to pay the price of an effort, in view of the fact that there are some things that are worth it.

And that leads me to the other side of the coin, the other part of the text that needs to be emphasized. Our Blessed Lord endured these things because of the joy that was set before Him. He never once took His eye from the fact that beyond the cross there was something else. With God the end result for those who love Him and serve Him is always a more blessed thing!

It's going to be a sad day for the Christian church when we quit talking about Heaven and Hell -- honestly now! And what are Heaven and Hell but part of our basic concept that at the end of the journey there is pay-day, there is a time of reckoning -- there is the moment of award. It most certainly comes! The Christian church is perfectly right in constantly reminding its people of that which is yet to come. For with all the ardor in my soul I tell you, eventually every man sits down to his own table of consequences, be it reward, or be it punishment. The end result is the same.

Don't you dare rule out the element of reward in the practice of Christian religion. In our so-called nobler moments we talk much about virtue being its own reward. And so it is. And the word reward remains. Check the New Testament record for yourself and see how often the followers of Jesus Christ are urged to endure, even in the face of persecution - - for great will be our reward in Heaven. God never short-changes any man who fulfills the obligation that He rests upon him, for the simple reason that God in His infinite wisdom knows that there are certain blessings that belong only to those who are called upon to endure, and to pay a price. This I most certainly believe.

* * * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"THE MAN WITH THE BOOK"

THROUGH JESUS CHRIST, Thy Son,
Our Lord. Amen.

Now that I look back at it, I presume that each of the professors at the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg had been instructed on that particular day to advise his students that they would do well to attend Chapel....because the President of the institution, the Rev. John Aberly, was going to make an important announcement. So it may have been that we had a few more in Chapel that day than ordinarily. And when the time came for the announcements to be made, the Rev. President told us that it was his privilege to announce that Gettysburg Seminary had received perhaps its largest bequest in its entire history. He told us what the munificent sum was.

When the service was over, as you might well expect, the students milled around, fairly excited that there was that much money around in the world, and that of all things, we here at Gettysburg Seminary would be receiving it. Somebody asked the question, well, what are we going to do with the money? Well, we took the question to Dr. Aberly himself, who told us that according to the will, there would be scholarships set up, and in addition to that, a certain amount of the bequest would be set aside specifically for the erection of a Luther statue.

Practically all of us who were students then were working our way through school. We were quite excited about the idea of scholarships being established. Frankly, there wasn't too much enthusiasm about the idea of taking good money to erect a statue, especially in Gettysburg. For those of you who have been to Gettysburg know that Gettysburg is studded by statues. No matter where you look on the battlefield, you see a monument. And now one more is to be added, to be added, of all places, on the campus of the Lutheran Theological Seminary.

Statues serve their purpose, make no mistake about it. They are, impersonal as they may appear, reminders of the past, some good thing that did happen, and perhaps some good thing that did happen for a certain purpose.

I don't know who made the decision as to what kind of a statue it ought to be, but every time I go by it, as I pass from the Old Dorm to the Church of the Abiding Presence, I'm grateful indeed that the responsible parties made the decision that they did. For those who have been there will readily recall that it's a statue of Luther seated, with a book in his hand.

Now the question might be raised immediately, what book? And well could the question be raised, because Martin Luther has been recognized as a controversial figure in history, and the course that men take can be decided upon by books that they read or books that they write. . . .

...I pause for the moment to tell you that John Osborne, the playwright, has one of his characters, no less than Pope Leo X, in the play that bears the name of "Luther" say, "There's a wild pig loose in the vineyard - - he must be hunted down, and he must be shot."

This is the statue of that man, who once was referred to, by someone no less than the Pope, as 'the wild pig who must be hunted down and shot.'

The man who gave the eulogy at the funeral service for Martin Luther said, "He was a flying angel from Heaven, and on his lips was the Gospel of God." The statue in Gettysburg commemorates the life of a man for whom a eulogist could say something as extravagant as that!

A few years ago TIME Magazine devoted its feature story to Martin Luther, and the cover itself was an interpretation of the man's face. The individual writer, the essayist for TIME, in his cover story of March 24 for that year, said, "There have been very few men who have altered the course of history, very few men indeed. One of them was Jesus Christ; another, Karl Marx; still another, Martin Luther." Within the past fifty years more books have been written about Martin Luther than of any other person who ever lived. The statue on the campus of Gettysburg Theological Seminary reminds us of a man, a man who was involved in a great movement.

You can never isolate a man from a movement, or the movement from the man. The Protestant era was bound to come, and God Himself always stretches forth His hand and puts His finger specifically upon a certain person, and He says, "You're my man for the hour." And we have reason to believe that this is one way that you can look upon this man.

Now what can I tell you about him this morning?

I would like to refer to him as "The-Man-With-The-Book" - - for there he is, cast for us in bronze, seated with a book in his hands. The question of course, what book? Let me attempt to give you a variety of answers.

Never for a moment minimize the importance of a book! Always, I say to you, at the cross-roads of history, there has been the man-with-the-book...

...one cannot think of the early Christian Church aside from
the Apostle Paul, with his books in his hands....

...you cannot think of Charles Darwin, at a cross-roads in history,

without thinking of a book in his hands -- "The Origin of the Species" . . .

...I submit to you that you can't possibly think of Adolph Hitler, without thinking of him with a book in his hand: "Mein Kampf" . . .

...you can't possibly think of Karl Marx, at the cross-roads of history, without thinking of him with his book in his hand -- "Das Kapital" . . .

...you can't possibly think of Jesus Christ without thinking of Him that day in Nazareth when He had The Book in His hand, upon which He prescribed His personal program for life, in which He said so majestically, "This day this Scripture is being fulfilled in your ears." . . .

...you can't possibly think of Martin Luther without the book in his hand.
Now, what book?

Well, I could suggest that it might be the Catechism, for that's a book that Martin Luther authored. Do I have to remind you how it came about? - - a good man of the Church, that's what he was, a devout and holy priest and a **good pastor**, who became greatly perturbed when he examined his people and found out that they knew so little about the Christian teachings - -

-- if parents brought their child to be baptized, Martin Luther, good and faithful priest, might say to them, "Why do you bring your child for baptism? -- what does baptism really mean?".....and they could not answer him to his satisfaction....they were ignorant of basic Christian teaching. They

were baptized and they were having their children baptized, but they didn't know what baptism meant....

-- when they came to him for confession, and he would hear them out, and when he suggested that they come to the Sacrament, to receive the Holy Communion, he might say to them, "And when you come to receive Holy Communion, what does it mean?"....they could not answer. They bore the name of Jesus Christ, they came to receive the Holy Communion, and they didn't know what Holy Communion meant.....

-- they recited the words of the Apostles' Creed, and he'd say, "What does it mean when you say that God is the Creator, God the Father Almighty -- what does that mean? What happens in your life as a result of it?"....they could not answer...."You say that Jesus Christ is your Saviour -- how does He save you?"....
...they could not answer.

So he set himself down. And he wrote a series of questions-and-answers, a hand-book, a manual of the Christian teachings -- one of the great heritage of the Protestant tradition. And he designed it so that the head of the household, the father, would sit down with his family after supper in the evening, and he would teach his own children the Catechism.

What book? -- it could be the Catechism.

What book?

It could be a hymnal. You're not unaware of the fact, of course, that it was Martin Luther who loved to sing, it was Martin Luther who wrote some of the great hymns of the church. He'd read the Bible, and then he'd para-

phrase them -- as an example, the hymn that you've just sung is a paraphrase of Psalm 46 -- "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble ...therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea . . ." Are you aware of the fact that to all intents and purposes, Martin Luther was the father of congregational singing? In the church of his day and before, when people came to church, whatever singing or chanting was done was done by a select group of people. Imagine what vitality our services would lack if we did not sing! Christians were meant to sing the songs of the redeemed! You go through the hymnal sometime, when you wait before the service begins, and profitably spend your time studying some of the hymns that were written by Martin Luther, which declare for us some of the basic teachings of the Christian religion.

What book in the hands of this man? Of course you have it! -- the Bible. When I was a student in seminary, I was invited one time by one of the professors to put into one sentence how I thought the Protestant/^{Reformation}movement came about. I was foolish enough to say, and yet I like to think there was some merit in what was said -- that it all came about because one man read his Bible and took it seriously! Would you be willing to reduce it to something as simple as all that? Martin Luther, a good and faithful priest of the Church, recognized the fact that in the church that he loved, there was corruption. Because, you see, the church is made up of a bunch of sinners. It always has been, And sinners can show error in judgment. Sinners can allow practices to develop that are not salutary. Even within the church, and particularly within the church as an institution if not within the church as a fellowship.

There has to be a norm, there has to be a corrective, and that's part of

the glory of the sacred writings of Scriptures. Because if you read the Scriptures, you always have the corrective, you always have the norm. This was the guiding principle in the life of Martin Luther: he would test all things according to the Scriptures! When he would sit down with a group of other people in the church of his day, trying to arrive at some decision, it was Martin Luther who would say, "But what do the Scriptures say?" It's been part of the genius of the Protestant tradition, this respect for Holy Writ.

I remember, perhaps a decade and more ago, when three or four of us from Saint Luke Church had the good fortune to sit down in dialogue with a group of other people in this community, who represented other Christian persuasions. We numbered in that group that met on a Sunday night, several priests who were stationed at Catholic University. And they told us, when we would talk together, how they fairly envied those of us who were Protestant in the high priority that we gave to the Scriptures....how we even had such things as Bible schools.....how the Lutheran Church in particular even required that any man who would preach from a pulpit in the Lutheran Church had to preach according to the Scriptures! It was Martin Luther, when he sat down with any group of people, would say, "First, what do the Scriptures day? Let's be guided by that."

In a world such as ours that's falling apart, we do well to look back to that man-with-a-book who again and again would say, "sola Scriptura" -- "only by the Scriptures".....and you may remember that great moment in history when he stood there, as though all of the Holy Roman Empire was against him -- not just stubborn German character that he was, but the stubbornness that's born

of a man of conviction. He said, "I will not budge!" (a free translation, of course) " - - you can't get me to change my mind, unless you can prove to me by the Bible - - I am held captive by the Word of God - - - "one of the great moments in all history, when a man who stood his ground and altered the course of history, because of the high regard that he had for the sacred writings.

I don't know whether you remember it as well as some of us do, but a few years ago we used to talk about building these shelters, to protect us from nuclear atomic fall-out. It was recommended that almost every household have their own. One evening when we were talking about this sort of thing, somebody asked Florence Reissig, who happened to be in our little group, "Florence, if you had to live in a fall-out shelter, and you had to be denied certain things for a certain period of time -- your routine would be definitely interrupted and everything would drastically change in a moment that you entered that fall-out shelter, and you wouldn't know how long you might have to be there, to occupy your time you might take with you certain things.....Florence, what books would you take? If you could take three," the interrogator asked, "What would you take?" Immediately Florence Reissig answered, "I'd take a copy of the Bible....I would take a copy of the Service Book and Hymnal of our Church.. ...I would take a copy of Luther's Catechism."

The books that people read determine the way they live. The books that people write have a pronounced effect on all history. So I point with pride on your behalf to our man Luther, man-with-the-book. We do well to cherish the Scriptures as did he.

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

A CHRISTIAN FACING DEATH

GRACE, MERCY and peace from God
our Father and from his Beloved
Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

The older we become the greater the circle of friends that stretches into Heaven, including those whom we have loved who have passed from the Church Militant into the Church Triumphant. I think of him now, one person in particular included in that number. I became his friend when I became a pastor in the Pennsylvania community of South Williamsport. He was the kind of a person who was a beloved small-town physician. His name was Charles Francis McLane, every bit as Irish as they come and as devout a Roman Catholic as you're likely to find anywhere.

Occasionally on a Saturday night he'd have the back porch light burning. That was a signal to me, his friend, telling me that he had now come back from his latest call and that he was home....that if I had time to come in and sit down and just talk a bit, he'd be happy to have that happen. Every now and then that's the kind of thing we did. And I remember one evening in particular, he said to me, "Pastor, I'm not telling you what to do -- religion is your field; medicine is mine. But if I were you, I'd go over to (such-and-such) a place and make a call pretty soon, because Uncle Jake isn't going to make it, and I'm not sure that his family is prepared to face the fact of death." So my friend encouraged me to be the good pastor, to provide a measure

of support in advance of an eventuality that was most certain to occur.

Some of us, I don't know if you are aware when I come to this sacred desk, part of my responsibility is to prepare you to face death -- part of the great responsibility to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ is to teach people how to live in order that they might be made ready to die. Someone has properly said that from the very beginning that we were born into this world, we are on our way to death. There are many people who absolutely refuse to recognize the fact. I want you to be very patient with me this morning because the sermon that I am about to preach is the first sermon of its kind, I think, that I've ever preached in 31 years, where I've deliberately taken an entire sermon period to deal with the truth of how a Christian faces death.

Oh, I would like to think that every sermon that I've preached, that I would lead into it -- I would like to be able to think that every time I stood up in front of you and echoed Biblical truth, that I've dealt with the Gospel as a matter of life and death.....I would like to believe that that's true. I would like to believe that every time you and I come together, that we're being edified, brought up, fortified, made strong in the face of the common events of life. This is one of the responsibilities and the privileges of a pastor -- to be able to relate to his people, in the common events of life and the things that are most certain to come to pass.

When Christianity first came to the British Isles some 1300 years ago, the first missionaries were welcomed by King of the Northumbrians....

...can't you picture him there in his castle with his court around him, letting them know that he'd especially called

the occasion in order to hear this bearer of a brand new religion.....in the flickering flames there by the fire that came from a great fireplace, after they had eaten, the missionary spoke. When he had finished, he said, "Now perhaps you'd like to ask a question or so." - - this is the way it's been recorded. There was a brief silence, and then somebody broke the silence by saying, "We know a great deal about this life, but I'd be willing to know more about your religion if you can tell us anything at all about life after death!"

They tell us, for the most part men are interested in life after death, although it's said quickly, that any number of people refuse to face the fact of death. King Louis the XV of France, so it's been reported, issued a royal decree that no one was ever to speak of death in his presence...no one was ever to remind him that one day he might die. I am told that whenever he went out and got into his carriage, he made perfectly plain to whoever was driving him that he wasn't to go anywhere by a monument or tablet or a church-yard that would remind him of the fact of death.

Some few years ago, a friend of mine for whom I have high regard gave me a series of clippings from the Chicago Tribune. There had been four articles that had been featured by that newspaper dealing with death in contemporary society. I don't know how many people read those articles. I read them for several reasons. One, because my friend was thoughtful enough to clip them for me. Second, because as a pastor, I am caught with any number of you who have to deal with the fact of death. And perhaps by reading these articles I might be better equipped to minister to your need. And as some of

you may know, I read them with more than ordinary interest because I, too, in recent weeks, have known what it is to pass into the Valley of the Shadow, and to lay a dear one to rest. So I read the articles for these reasons.

But there was one thing that disturbed me greatly. This perceptive writer maintains in the article that modern man refuses to accept the fact of death. He deliberately attempts to ignore it. She indicated something in the article which you may not have realized, that in some of our hospitals they have a stretcher, and the stretcher has underneath it an enclosed area, so that when a patient dies, the patient is put on that stretcher and then put into the enclosed area, so that when the stretcher goes down the corridor of the hospital, you see only an empty stretcher, because we don't want people to recognize the fact that someone has died.

But death is the one absolute fact. It is the eventuality that most certainly occurs. None of us may be able to recognize, even as Philip of Macedon did, when he issued a decree, quite contrary to Louis XV -- Philip had a slave whom he ordered by royal decree that every day of his life, he was to come into the presence of the King -- no matter where he found the King, no matter what the King was doing -- and he would say to him, "Philip, remember -- some day you must die!" Yet we don't want to think about it, we don't want to talk about it.

I would fail you if as your Pastor I would not ask you to think about it. And I most certainly would fail you if as your Pastor I would not help you to recognize the fact that there is a Christian way to face death. I would be less than honest if I were to tell you that I know a great deal about it. Only one person who has ever lived and died was able to come back and talk to us about it -- Jesus Christ, our Blessed Lord. I can tell you that death is

a mystery. I can tell you that when it may come you and I may never know, nor how. I only know it occurs. I begin at that point.

...I know that every day in the United States of America,
5,000 people breathe their last....and by the time this
sermon will have been preached, from the time it began,
between 60 and 80 people will have died....

I cannot tell you why some people end their years as they do, why they come to the end of their earthly pilgrimage in so short a period of time. These things I cannot tell you! But with all the ardor of my soul I can tell you that a Christian was made to face death positively, because his Lord and his Master has said certain things to him about it. It's to Jesus Christ now that I invite your attention. And here's the text for this sermon -- the familiar 27th verse of the 14th chapter of the Gospel according to John:

"Let not your heart be troubled, neither let
it be afraid . . . "

Are you aware of the fact that most of us are by nature fearful? And among the things that we fear are always the unknown and the unexpected? Some of us can brace ourselves for almost anything, and get ready for it, if we know what it is that's going to happen, and when it's going to take place, and how it's going to take place. But it's the unknown, the unexpected, that throws us for a loop. But Jesus Christ, Lord and Giver of Life, said to a handful of His friends one time, as He drew them aside,

"I have something I want to tell you - - "

...and He's referring to His time of separation from them -- He said,

"But I don't want you to be afraid and I don't want
you to be troubled - - - "

Now it's one thing to tell people not to be afraid, it's another thing to be able to give them the reasons why they need not fear. And when our Blessed Lord began to do that, and I hope you remember what He said . . .

...for one thing, He said, "I will see you again - " God and the human soul belong to each other. Nothing can break that bond. That's a precious thing to remember, to hold you in good stead. And when God through Jesus Christ spoke those words, He gave us to understand that those words could also be spoken by those whom He loved. For love is indestructible, it's the nature of love to be eternal. And anyone whom you love, and anyone who loves you, it will never be lost to you. This is part of the Christian message.....

And then our Blessed Lord said, "In my father's house I am going to have a room for you - - "

...this is another thing that some of us fear: the possibility of being excluded. Come now, be honest with yourself, even as I am honest with myself - - when some events are being planned, when some occasion's being scheduled, like as not we have said to ourselves, will we be included? - - and particularly if it's an event without peer, without parallel whatsoever, a once-in-a-lifetime event, and we could be invited...

....it's a horrible thing to know that you could be excluded. ...but our Blessed Lord said, "I don't want you to be troubled, I don't want you to be afraid. You're going to be counted in! - - "

For the Christian, whether you realize it or not, and it may be small comfort at this moment, some day it might be recognized that the most wonderful thing that could ever happen to you is the prospect of Heaven. And Jesus Christ says to His followers: "I'm going to see that you're counted in!" For the believer in the Lord Jesus Christ there is always the assurance that as he puts his trust in Christ, he's being counted in. And you understand it, of course you do, that you and I don't get counted in because of our merit.

"Nothing in my hand I bring,
Simply to the Cross I cling - - "

...that's the way the hymn puts it. Let it be fully understood that you and I are sinners until the day we die. We are the unworthy ones. And nothing that you and I could ever do could constitute a guarantee (?) that would open the gates of Heaven. But we can be counted in because of what Jesus Christ has done for us. The redemptive deed has been accomplished! Even while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us! - - that we might be reconciled to God! That's the Christian message! That's the Gospel that I have been telling you Sunday after Sunday - - God loves us that much, that He wants to count us in!

But it's little enough that a man should say to himself, I have it made, because the One who is the Lord and Giver of Life is also the Judge, and only a man who has it made is the man who lives his life daily in the prospect of Heaven, who allows his tenure on earth to reflect the thing that he one day hopes to enjoy perfectly. Heaven belongs to those who look forward to it.

But we can say at times, it constitutes a blessed release. That's why we say we're translated into Christ's nearer presence, and the Christian whether he lives or whether he dies, he's always in the hand of God. We be-

long in the hand of God either with our belief or our unbelief. But for the Christian there's joy in believing because of his faith in Christ, he will not be left out.

I want to close with a simple reference to one of the grandest men of our century. If you and I might be able to look at contemporary man from the perspective of Heaven, we might focus our eye upon an old man and a good man who became Pope. His name was John XXIII. And when he knew that death was imminent, with an untroubled heart and mind and spirit he simply said,

"My bags are packed."

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"COMING - READY OR NOT"

Through Jesus Christ, Thy
Son, our Lord. Amen.

On this Sunday next before Advent, the sermon bears the title, "Coming, Ready or Not." The text, from the 25th chapter of the Gospel according to Matthew, a portion of which serves as the Gospel for today, and the 6th verse:

"And at midnight there was a cry made, 'The
bridegroom comes! Go out to meet him'."

I can't tell you, honestly I can't whether they were pretty or not; nor can I tell you whether they were young or old. I can tell you there were ten of them -- ten bridesmaids. And they caught the eye of the preacher. He happened to remember their situation and their experience, and undoubtedly He tucked it away in the recesses of His mind, rolled it over quite frequently, with the understanding that one day He'd use that as an illustration in a sermon. And that's exactly what our Blessed Lord did.

Time now was running out on Him. He'd had so few occasions to be with His disciples and anybody else who might gather around as He was talking to them. It was absolutely essential that He make His thrust, as effectively as He possibly could. He had spent three years with them. They had talked about a number of things, they had done a number of things together. Knowing human nature as well as He did, He wasn't fooled by the fact that they understood no more than they did. In fact, ever so frequently He was appalled that they understood so little. It may have been then, and I think a person can put it this way, that with renewed effort Jesus Christ was trying to make perfectly

plain to them, in these remaining conversations, the things that they had clearly to understand about themselves, and their relationship to God.

It may have been at this point, then, that He remembered the story of the ten girls.....they were chosen to be bridesmaids. Now there are some things that you'll have to understand about an Oriental wedding. An Oriental wedding is so vastly different from the weddings that we have in our day, here in the West. As an example, the bridesmaids did not accompany the bride, but part of their responsibility was to wait for the bridegroom and to make certain that he got to the place where he could meet the bride, where the wedding was to occur.

Now what you may never have understood before was this: that even though it had been announced that there was to be a wedding, the precise hour was never given. You get your invitations to a wedding, of course you do, and there it's made perfectly plain who are to be married, where they are to be married, when they are to be married. But in the East, the word simply gets around that a wedding is going to take place. And whenever the preparations are finally made, it's then that the wedding occurs. Now you have to understand this - - and the bridesmaids are to wait until the bridegroom is ready, and when he's ready, then they go along with him.

Most of the weddings occur at night, and that meant that the bridesmaids had to have their torches and their lamps. It was a common understanding, if they didn't have their lamps burning, they couldn't be in the procession. Now somewhere Jesus had attended this wedding, when the situation of the ten girls caught His fancy - - - when the time came to accompany the bridegroom, five of them were ready....and five of them were totally unprepared.

The unprepared began to panic.....they did the only reasonable thing --

they turned to the ones nearest at hand and said, "Give us some of your oil, that we may go along with you." And very wisely and very properly the five who were fully prepared said, "But we can't do it - - as much as we would like to do it! - - we just can't do it....because we have an obligation -- somebody has to go along with the bridegroom, somebody has to see this thing through. And if we were to give you our oil, then what would happen if our lamps go out as well as yours?"

...they answered very honestly, and surely not without some degree of compassion.....

So there was the situation. And our Blessed Lord, the wandering preacher, tucked it away in the recesses of His mind and some day He drove home, as He knew He would, with a single thrust, that in the critical moment a man is either ready, or he's not ready - - - he's prepared, or he's unprepared.

Now let's get one thing perfectly clear. I haven't come to this sacred desk this morning to preach a Boy Scout sermon. Wonderful as it is that Boy Scouts have as their motto: BE PREPARED. Anybody knows the wisdom of trying to prepare yourself against a critical situation, and wise indeed is the man who order his life so that he might be able to meet an emergency....

...I'm not talking about having an extra loaf of bread ready, important as that may be....

...I'm not talking about making certain that your gas tank is filled to capacity when you begin a trip, especially when you travel along a highway, important as that may be....

...I'm not talking about being prepared in general.....

Being true to my Lord and my Master, with a single thrust I'd like you to

contemplate the fact of being ready to meet your Maker....being ready for your confrontation with the fact of God. And I'm not thinking simply of the moment of death. I'm thinking of any moment when God undeniably appears upon the horizon of your life....and there He is. When that moment occurs, according to the teaching of Jesus Christ, man is ready....or he isn't ready.

Being true to the teaching of this parable, I would have you to understand that when a wedding occurred, it was a happy event. Perhaps nothing that ever took place in Oriental life was quite as happy as an Oriental wedding, especially for the disadvantaged. It may well be that the only decent meal that they ever had in a year's time was the meal that they ate when they were invited to somebody's wedding. With all the pressures against them in that day, when you had only two classes of society....the very, very rich and the very, very poor.....and with so many things working against you constantly. It could well be that the only time some people laughed was when they went off to the wedding celebration where there was music and dancing. Let it be registered clearly in your minds, it was a happy occasion.

I would like to suggest to you that you think of the appearing of the Lord upon the horizon of your life as a happy occasion. So often we think only in terms of the somber aspect of judgment, the possibility of being consigned to Hell. And I would never, never withdraw for a single moment any proper emphasis that ought to be given in that kind of preaching -- of the fact that He comes to judge, that when He judges He draws the line.

Traditionally we speak of it - - a line between Heaven and a line between Hell. I'm not forgetting that. But I wouldn't for the moment have you to forget the line also has on the other side of it the prospect of Heaven - - - that He who comes to us as the Lord and Giver of Life comes to give us the blessings of God, the joys of Heaven, the happiness of being

numbered in the ranks of the redeemed. That's something wonderful to anticipate.....that's worth getting ready for.

I honestly believe that people live according to the things that they anticipate, and happy indeed is the man who anticipates some good thing, whose life is ordered by some happy prospect.....

....surely we look upon the joy of having children in our home, or part of our life and our love, whether they live in our home or not....and we anticipate their first step -- a happy event.....we anticipate the formation of their first word -- people even record it for posterity on tape recorders.....we anticipate their first day in school, we anticipate their graduation from school, we anticipate their first job.....

....sometimes I'm inclined to think the tragedy of our day is we've ruled out the possibility of anticipating good things. For the Christian, who orders the days of his years by the prospect of the return of Jesus Christ, he lives for the thought of the happy day.....they even used to sing in the good old days, "O Happy Day!"

George Buttrick in one of his sermons, one of his writings, used to tell about the man who had gone off to the big city -- his business had taken him there, and of course he ran the risk that people run when he was separated from the folks back home. He did commit some acts of indiscretion, either in his folly or his stupidity, or sheer wickedness. Riding home on the train, his conscience begins to prick him. He becomes uneasy. He knows exactly what he's done, and he knows the people that he's hurt. You can imagine how he feels when the conductor comes through the coach announcing his name! Somebody's

gotten aboard the train at the last stop, and has asked the conductor as they passed through his coach, to make known that there's somebody aboard the train now to meet him. The conductor says, "It's your wife" -- and much to his complete surprise, the conductor says, "She couldn't wait until you got home that she might greet you -- she and your daughter had a friend drive them the distance to the last stop and out of sheer love they've gotten on the train, just to be with you....to welcome you home even before you've gotten off the train." The God who is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is sending His Son to us along the way, to welcome us, to greet us, in pure Oriental fashion -- to bring us along the way. That's how much God loves us.

That's a happy thought, my friend! -- to know that there looms on the horizon of life God Himself, who in sheer unadulterated goodness....and as He appears, we're either ready, or we're unready.

I wish that somehow we could establish this in our work among young people. I remember how it was done years ago, when we went off to Camp Nawakwa... ..we had a boys' camp for two weeks, we had a girls' camp for two weeks, and I surmise had much the same thing at both camps. We had a campfire. And God's precious servant, Michael Hadwin Fisher, used to talk with us about boy-and-girl relationships, with true sensitivity. And one of the things that he said was this, to those of us who were just beginning our years in high school -- he made the dent even then: "One of these days you're going to meet the girl-- get ready for her now....make sure that you'll be every inch the man she ought to have!" ...and he enabled us to believe, Michael Hadwin Fisher, that marriage is the perfectly beautiful thing it was meant to be, and that one day when the lady of the man's heart would loom upon the horizon, he should be ready.

If a man like that can speak to a bunch of teenagers, how much more important it is for those of us to sit down every now and then to think of the tremendous

truth that God in all His glory and goodness and greatness is most certain to come our way. Let's get ready to meet Him - - to take the fullest possible advantage of it. And when He comes, as come He will, He's coming - ready or not! But we can be ready.

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"THE DAY IS AT HAND - - GET WITH IT!"

THROUGH Jesus Christ, Thy
Son, our Lord. Amen.

Modern man, if he wanted to characterize himself. could see himself as a creature who is always feeling as though somebody else is trying to tell him something. Of course. Ours is the great age of communication. Thanks to so many different media, there are always people trying to get the word across to us....radio...television....first-class, second, third, fourth-class mail -- we can even get mail, you see, without our name on it at all -- somebody trying to tell us something -- he may not know our name, but he knows where we live. And so it's simply labeled "Resident"....and you and I get it.

There are many different ways of communicating. We've never had so many: radio....television....first, second, third, fourth-class mail.....
...bumper stickers....posters....graffiti....

....would you believe it -- buttons. They're quite the thing these days, especially among those who are young.

I attended a buffet dinner for college students in Bieber Hall on Friday. And as soon as I went to the table, one of the first things I saw in front of me was the ever-present button -- a couple of curved lines, a couple of dots characterizing a smiling face, then the word communicated to me there:

SMILE -- GOD LOVES YOU

In one of the periodicals that comes regularly to my desk there's this advertisement: "BUTTONS...BUTTONS....BUTTONS....BUTTONS....

NEW BUTTONS....BUTTONS WITH A MESSAGE...BRIGHTLY COLORED.

We have just replenished our supply. Get yours now while

THEY LAST! -- 50¢ ea., minimum order \$3.00.

Then here are some of the things that you might be able to get, buttons that communicate....

WARNING - BREATHING MAY BE HAZARDOUS TO YOUR HEALTH

THE WOMEN ARE COMING

RAP WITH GOD

BE WHAT YOU ARE

NOT WITH MY LIFE YOU DON'T

VICTIM OF ORIGINAL SIN

WHAT DID I DO WRONG?

...and for the one that serves the purpose best for the sermon today:

THE WORLD IS A THING GONE WRONG

If I were a button-maker, I think I'd come out with a sequel to that one, that I'd have as much of a market as this chap has who came up with this one for THE WORLD IS A THING GONE WRONG - - I'd match it by saying on my button:

SO WHAT ELSE IS NEW?

Ever since the dawn of time, there have been those who have been saying, "The world's gone wrong - - it's gotten quite out of hand - - it's a mad world! - - stop it! -- I want to get off!"

'Tis a pity indeed, of course it is, because the world wasn't meant to go wrong. When it was created as a thing pleasing in God's sight, God made it and God said, "It's good." And after God made the world He put you and me in it, presumably to be the crowning glory of all His creation. And after He got everything set up the way it ought to be, one could well picture God walking away from it -- almost congratulating Himself and saying, it's a good job...it will last a long time. I know what I've put into it, I know what it's meant

to become!

But when God made us His crowning glory, He gave us the opportunity to choose, to make up our own minds regarding things, even to make up our own minds regarding Him. And eventually we became competitive with God, that's what we did. Because God had His own mind for the world, God has His own plan for the world, and God said "It's good." And it's just like man to come up and think that he could do God one bit better, and so after a while man decided to re-shape the world, to re-design it, to make it run according to his purpose. And as soon as man began to meddle with God's world, that's when it became a thing gone wrong. As soon as we tried to reach for the controls, and we thought we had it for a while, we began to veer in the wrong direction.

Well there's one thing about God: He's never given up His interest in us; He's never given up His concern for us. And when He saw that this was beginning to happen, God, too, is the Great Communicator....God, too, tried to get His word across to us.....God, too, is always trying to tell us something. And as I read the Scripture correctly, I find God endeavoring to get His message to us.....

....He raised up the patriarchs, the great leaders like Moses....He gave us the Ten Commandments....prophets, priests, kings, judges.....each in his own way trying to say to us what God wanted us to hear.....each one in his own way trying to get across to us God's message....
...each one in his own way trying to tell us, you're going in the wrong direction, you're going about it in the wrong way! -- check the blue-print again! -- get out the

manufacturer's manual! -- turn to the operating
instructions!

...God's always been trying to get this across to us.

But it never worked out as well even as He thought that it would. Because these buttons, you see, their language is as contemporary as tomorrow's dawn. They speak to our conditions, these labels, these wordings, these slogans. What things they trigger off in any preacher's mind as he could preach a homily on any one of them -- THE WORLD IS A THING GONE MAD!

....SO WHAT ELSE IS NEW?

All this leads me to the text for today's sermon, a text that's inspired and drawn from the Epistle Lesson for this, the First Sunday in Advent -- the words of one of God's great communicators, a man by the name of Apostle Paul. He sent a letter off to a bunch of Christians who lived in the imperial city of Rome. He'd never met these people -- he wasn't so sure that he'd ever get a chance to meet them, but at any rate he wanted to communicate with them.

...that's the way God's spokesmen are -- whenever you get
a spokesman for God, he can't keep his mouth shut.....

The Apostle Paul was a man like that, and he couldn't quite keep his pen in his pocket. He was reaching for it constantly, because as God's spokesman, he knew that there was something that had to be said, there was a message still to get across. And as he wrote, there in that city of Corinth, a very wicked city, he was very much aware of what had happened to the world -- it was a world which had become a thing gone mad, the world a thing which had gone wrong. Darkness had set in. So the Apostle Paul says in the words of the text for this sermon: "The night is far spent; the day is at hand. Let us therefore cast off the works of darkness and let us put on the armor of light."

Now if God were a button-maker, I'd suggest to you that He'd say to the Apostle Paul, "You've got something there! You've given me an idea for two buttons. With one button I'll communicate to the world:

THE NIGHT IS FAR SPENT

...God trying to get the message across
to us: well, things have gotten just about as bad as they can get!
...that's what the first part of the text really means:

"The night is far spent" -- maybe things can't get any worse!

You know, don't you, that that's the mood and the temper of our day -- that there are people in a position to report to us that the world is in a terrible mess, politically, economically, socially, culturally....and from a preacher's point of view, we're not faring very well religiously. And after two thousand years of the Christian Gospel, one looks at the world today and says to himself, "Is this what it's come to?" There's far more pessimism abroad in the world than you and I care to admit, and there are times when we literally have to shake ourselves to free ourselves from its clutch.

Well, God's a two-button man, don't forget. The one button may read:

THE NIGHT IS FAR SPENT

...but God doesn't stop just by telling us how bad things are. God marches on to tell us something positive -- The night is far spent? - - match it with another button that reads:

THE DAY IS AT HAND!

And what is meant by that?

Let me give you a free translation:

THE DAY IS AT HAND! -- Get with it, brother! -- Begin to live

as you were meant to live today ! -- but as creatures who belong to the community of the day-break. We're not the sons of darkness, we're the sons of light.....

This I believe is the message of Advent: God wants more time to get something across to us, for in the darkness of that day, God sent His Son to be the Light of the world. ~~Not~~ ^{In} a world that had grown sour and become so very, very bad -- in that precise moment in history, God invaded His own world -- then and there -- and did something about it. The Apostle Paul is the man who said to people: Now is the accepted time -- now is the day of salvation -- don't put it off!

But with the pressure of the darkness, and with the pressure of the despair that becomes our day, most of us are about to fold up our hands and not do a single thing....just wait for somebody else to write the obituary. Says God through His spokesman, the Apostle Paul, "This is not the manner of the Christian. No matter how dark the night, he gears and prepares himself for the fact that the day is at hand.

I'm grateful for many things that my younger friends continue to teach me. I prize very much the fact that they like to think of themselves as the Now Generation. Oh, they teach me as I evaluate this philosophy, that it has negative connotations, but on the other hand, there is a positive way of looking at it, for there are those who say, "We ought to do our thing now -- we want to make our contribution today" -- and this commands any man's respect.

For if I understand that part of the philosophy aright, I hear them saying, we shall not wait ten years to do our thing -- we'll do it now." This is always pleasing in God's sight! Says the Apostle Paul, Now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation. But I warn you, there's that first button:

THE WORLD IS A THING GONE MAD

...but as over against that, the message of Advent -- God's great button for all the world to read:

HE COMES - - NOW

Advent is not simply gearing oneself for some long, far-away expected event. You make a mistake, my friend, if in this Advent season you're going to think only of the re-appearing of Jesus Christ centuries from now. The message of Advent is this:

HE WHO CAME . . COMES

...begin to live and to act today as in a manner that becomes the Christian.

You ought to read J. B. Phillips interesting translation for the Epistle for the day, how he comes with a heavy hand and says,

"I have been talking to you about your behavior...."

...and God is always talking to us about the way we ought to behave - - not yesterday - - not tomorrow.....but today.

"The night is far spent -- the day is at hand - - "

...a free translation? -- a third button, if you please:

GET WITH IT

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

The Right Question

Ask a stupid question: you get a stupid answer.

At least that's what the chap discovered when he was walking down the street and saw his neighbor raking leaves. And he said to his friend raking leaves: "Raking leaves, are you?".....and his friend answered, "No, I'm baking a cake."

...you ask a stupid question: prepare yourself for a stupid answer.

...it's the mother, you see, who surprises her son, at this particular time of the year, any time between now and Christmas, as he's opened the closet door -- as he's gone to the carport or the garage, looking around in areas presumably forbidden....and the mother says, "Looking for something, are you?"

(what is it: " - - a stupid question" -- it's perfectly obvious that he's looking for something!)

....and he gives a very stupid answer: "Nothing."

...a stupid answer, for the simple reason that no man ever looks just for nothing. Any man who is looking is looking for something, or someone.

According to the Gospel lesson for today, an eccentric chap, who wore strange clothing, ate strange food, put a very unusual question to a very unusual Man -- I warn you in advance, it was no stupid question, and he got no stupid answer. The question that John the Baptist from prison put to

Jesus Christ who was on the outside doing a bit of free-lance preaching, if you please - - "Are you the one who should come, or should we look for another?" - - - that's, really now, no stupid question. For basically it's the nature of man to look for someone or something over, above and beyond him, who might meet his need, who might do something about this troubled world -- who might set it straight. If you please, to use the classic expression: who might redeem man and be his Saviour.

There was a time when John the Baptist, the man who put this question, was all gung-ho for Jesus Christ -- to use the vernacular of our day, he got people "all psyched up" - - he went around from village to village and he said, "Get ready! -- look for Him! -- He's coming!"

..."someone's coming -- start looking!"

Oh, I know what they tell us, that no man ever really finds God, because properly understood, it's God who finds us. Be that as it may, you know of what I speak, it's the nature and the characteristic of man to look out, to search the horizon, to reach: for something over, above and beyond him. And John the Baptist was telling people: "He's come! The day has arrived -- this is He!"

....in fact he was so enthusiastic about Jesus Christ, the One for whom people were looking, that he said, "He's so wonderful that, while you think I'm pretty good - - "(that's really what John the Baptist was saying, because people flocked to hear him preach as they hadn't flocked to hear any preacher of his type before) - - he said, "Why, this Jesus of whom I speak, for whom I say you ought to look -- I'm not even worthy to get down and touch His feet, to untie His sandals!"

But any man can sing God's praise when everything is going well with him. There was a crowd who had come out to hear John the Baptist preach. He was having a hey-day, and he felt, as ~~he~~ said, quite enthusiastic about Jesus Christ. But now there weren't any crowds, now his ego wasn't being satisfied, if I may be daring enough to put it that way, by having a podium. He was in jail. And his life had crowded in on him, and he was suffering despair and he was despondent, and he was beginning to wonder whether or not he had said the right thing about the right man. So he puts the question, a perfectly good one:

"Jesus, are you the one who is to come,
or should ~~we~~ **look for somebody else?**"

Well how about it? Do you honestly believe that Jesus Christ is God's last word to us? Do you honestly believe that in Jesus Christ all the fullness of God has been pleased to dwell? Jesus Christ having come, and during Advent we make much of the fact that He's going to re-appear -- are you satisfied in your own mind that He is going to produce, that He's going to deliver?that He's all that we have been told that He is?

- - well, if you have no aches and pains right now, if you have a measure of job security...if you're being treated half decent by your friends and your neighbors, and you haven't had a to-do lately with any teenager within your family circle....if you honestly feel that you're on top of things - - - then you might be pretty well satisfied, and you'll say, "God's in His Heaven, all's right with the world . . ."
...but when day follows day and night follows night, and things aren't nearly

as bright as you would like them to be, and the problem remains well-nigh unsolvable....and you know very well that you're at the bottom of the heap and not at the top....and when you know very well that you'll be maligned and maltreated - - - how about a good question now: Where are you, God?

- - What are you doing?

- - Are you all that they tell us you are?

- - Why don't you produce now?

...who among us has not had his moments when, if we're honest with ourselves, we haven't found ourselves in the position of John the Baptist -- putting a question like that, a good question: "God, are you really the one?"

There's nothing wrong with being honest with God. There's nothing wrong with crying out to God in the dark night of the soul, even though your cry may be tinged by doubt. Well, let it be a good question. And John the Baptist was absolutely sincere, and that's why he got a good answer to his good question: "Are you he who should come, or should we look for another?"

...and Jesus quietly and calmly said, "All right, look at it this way, John -- look at it this way: people who have been blind can now see! there have been some people who have been lame, and now they can walk! there are some people who had never heard the Gospel of God's redeeming love preached to them, and now they have heard it! Look at it this way, John -- there's good being done, and I'm about it right now!"....quietly, calmly, confidently.

Now what did that good answer really mean to that good question? I think it means several things that we might want to remember, that it might hold us in good stead when the dark night sets in on us.

One - God is always at work. We may not be able to see His hand, we may not be able to see the fruits of His efforts, but God is, and God is

at work. He's never idle. He's always doing something. And it may not be until some time later on, when we look back, maybe we discover how much God was at work in a particular situation, which vexed us, irritated us, laid us low and almost made us a complete doubter. But yet God was at work -- in that time and in that situation!

The second thing, it seems to me, that we might want to remember is this; if we can possibly remember it: that God like as not works at a far slower pace than we'd like to have Him work. And that isn't God's fault! It's the material with which He has to work. He, really now, hasn't made the progress in your soul that He should have made, has He? I can make that statement because I speak out of my own experience.....I who know full well how I continue to bring to Him one limitation after another -- the opportunities for witnessing that He lays before me that I never quite seize -- the good that I might have done, the kind deeds that I might have performed. He's given me the potential, and I have so little to show. And I have been at this business for quite a while, you know!

....just as you have been about it since your baptism, since your confirmation, and since you allowed it to be a matter of record that you love the Lord and you want to serve Him. We haven't traveled the quickened pace that God knows that we're capable of traveling. So one has to admit that God works in a slower way because He has to work in, through, and more often than not, around us -- if not because of us, then in spite of us.

And the third thing that needs to be said is this: that when God works, His preferred method is always to work through people -- person-to-person and person-through-person. For the most part it was one blind person at a time

being healed - - not a whole multitude of them. For the most part it was one lame man at a time who received, if you please, God's undivided attention....and then that lame man went his way and then God gave His attention to somebody else. We'd much prefer if God would save us all in-the-mass. But God prefers sometimes one-by-one, and properly understood, that's why we're all here together, because each of us has been the object of God's personal attention. And if you and I are aware of that, that's how we can look upon each other with a greater measure of joy and satisfaction, because we know that God has spoken to that person even as God has spoken to us, and to me.

I think there's something that we're forgetting in our day, my friend. There are those who maintain, as they shout it from the house-top, that the mission of the Church is to change community structure, that this is the primary task -- that social institutions have to be changed and re-structured overnight!

...how are things re-structured except through people? It's not too much to say that it's the changed man who brings about a changed order. It's a changed man who helps to redeem a situation by the grace of God. And all the time John the Baptist in prison -- who knows but what it might have been his heart's delight to get the word that Jesus Christ had suddenly called down from Heaven all the legions to drive the Romans into the sea, to crush the oppressor's hand, the occupying authority....and the only reply he got from the Wandering Preacher was this: "Some lame people can now walk - - - Some blind people can now see - - - and there are people whose lives are being changed because they've had the Gospel preached

to them"all the while we want God to take a giant step forward, and God says, "I can only inch along right now, but inch along I am." And He does.

Where are you, God?

What are you doing?

Is your work so effective that we can honestly believe that this is it? or do we have to look for another Messiah?

I wish I had the time to illustrate for you what has just been brought to my attention in the course of the past week. There are moments when I take you to task, even as I am certain you take me to task, believing that this congregation ought to take a most giant-like stride in a half-dozen different directions and all at the same time. And with you I sometimes wonder how much of a dent we're making anywhere. But then somebody brings to my attention a teenager who's gone off to college, and she transforms her whole dormitory because she puts into practice in her room nightly Advent devotions, remembering her experience here in this church.....inching along, perhaps that's all, but it's inching along, and moving solidly in the right direction....

....30 girls in a dormitory who had not gathered before, uniting in offering a prayer:

"Into my heart, into my heart, come into
my heart, Lord Jesus . . ."

Is it nothing to you that this morning at 8:00 o'clock, at the early Communion hour, there were two youngsters from last year's Confirmation

Class who approached the altar with as much reverence as you would want to find in anybody, and a member of this year's class along with them came to receive a blessing!.....

...no trumpets before them, no loud shouting....tomorrow morning, and each day in the course of the week, two-by-two, fanning out in this area, limited as it may be, people taking meals to folks ~~who are~~ much in need, who otherwise might not receive attention....in the manner of the spirit of Jesus Christ. The opportunities for the program of Meals on Wheels is unbounded, and their only limitation is that God doesn't have enough people who are willing to step forward and to say, "We will put our shoulder to the wheel, in order that this wonderful ministry might be able to do more in Christ's name."

As to why God is acting slowly, it's because of the obstacles that we've put in the way. So John the Baptist, who once had been gung-ho for Jesus Christ, was slowing up a bit. Naturally he was despondent because of his situation, and when he couldn't see the hand of God at work he didn't believe that the hand of God was at work anywhere.

Last evening in a House Blessing in the home of one of our parishioners, I was handed this card. It has a poem that you can well afford to hear. Maybe it's time for us to keep in our hearts the child-like faith that a youngster knows:

"Jesus loves me, this I know,
For the Bible tells me so,' --
Little children ask no more,
For love is all they're looking for,
And in a small child's shining eyes
The Faith of all the ages lies - -

And tiny hands and tousled heads
That kneel in prayer by little beds
Are closer to the dear Lord's heart
And of His Kingdom more a part
Than we who search, and never find,
The answers to our questioning mind - - - "
For faith in things we cannot see
Requires a child's simplicity,
For, lost in life's complexities,
We drift upon uncharted seas,
And slowly faith disintegrates
While wealth and power accumulates
And the more man learns the less he knows
And the more involved in things he grows,
And in his arrogance and pride
No longer is man satisfied,
To place his confidence and love
In the child-like faith in God above.
Oh, Father, grant once more to men
A simple childlike faith again.
With the small child's trusting eyes,
May all men come to realize
That faith alone can save man's soul
And lead him to a higher goal. "

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

WHEN HE COMES AGAIN - READY?

Grace, mercy and peace from God
our Father and from His Son, Jesus
Christ, our Blessed Lord. Amen.

I can only tell it to you as it was told to me -- even certain bits of information that I'd like to give to you I did not receive....was it in the morning, the afternoon, the evening -- I can't tell you. Perhaps it's quite irrelevant at that. But this I did hear: that in the year 1860, the latter part of the year at that, there was a man who entered the office of General John A. Logan -- a man who had retired from military service and was now a practising attorney in the city of Chicago. As he entered Logan's office he carried under his arm a box. And as he placed it on the desk of General Logan, he said, "This is something that you have not seen before. It's a brand new contrivance, and by means of this mechanism it's possible for a man to speak to another man at some distance through use of a wire."

....then the man who brought the strange contrivance into Logan's office said, "You can be my partner in this enterprise for \$500.00 -- you can have a half."

...Logan looked at the man and thought he was peculiar, a fanatic. He was as gracious as he could be, so the report goes, but after a while he bowed him out of his office, dismissed him....

The man who was dismissed and bowed out of his office was Alexander Graham Bell. As the report has it, he had brought to Logan the first working model of the telephone.

Now, as you well know, to this day, if you wanted to have a half-interest in the Bell System, it would require hundreds upon hundreds upon hundreds the

times of that sum of \$500.00. So Logan missed his chance. He was being invited to share in some brand new thing, and for one reason or another, he passed it by.

I suppose if we had time and this would be the place to do it, if we were so inclined to think so, I could encourage some of you to stand up and tell about the chance that you had that you passed by, and to the day that you die you'll regret the fact that you hadn't the wisdom, the foresight, or perhaps had not laid enough by to take advantage of an opportunity that would come your way. There's a member of this congregation who every now and then tells me how, not too long ago, he could have purchased for the sum of \$500.00 an acre, much of the land that constitutes the Langley Shopping Area. Now, he says, you'd be lucky if you could purchase it for \$25.00 a square foot.

I have not come to this sacred desk today to serve as your financial advisor. The only advice that I might give you, if you're thinking in terms of stock, would be to buy low and sell high! But I would leave this sort of thing to someone else, gifted and skilled, and if you can take advantage of his expertise, so much the better for you and I wish you well. But as your shepherd and bishop of your souls, as your spiritual advisor, I am constrained to tell you that there is Someone who is always coming our way, inviting us to share in some brand new experience, encouraging us to enter into partnership with Him, to become part of a brand new idea, to become part of a brand new concept for life, to walk out with Him and in through new doors that lead to greater and more glorious things.

I am not unmindful of the fact that I stand at this sacred desk on the Fourth Sunday in Advent. For what is Advent but the Church's way of tradi-

tionally reminding us of the truth that God came to earth in a brand new way and offered us a brand new concept, and invites us to take advantage of it, to make an investment in His Kingdom. Do you remember the greeting that you got at Christmas-time several years ago from the Parsonage Family? I remember it well -- it was a very simple greeting. These were the only words that appeared on it, aside from the designation of the Parsonage Family:

"Rejoice - - He who came....comes!"

And this is what the Church tells us every Advent season - - God has come. He who came continues to come! And as the Scripture, the text for today's sermon, the 8th verse of the 18th chapter of the Gospel of Luke puts it:

"When the Son of God appears again, will
he find faith on earth?"

...reminding us that He who came will some day come again in glory.

In that Methodist church across the street from the church that I attended in that small town in Pennsylvania, they had an heroic-size painting of the Ascension -- Jesus Christ ascending into Heaven, presumably as a reminder to that congregation as they came back every Sunday, to get ready, to prepare themselves, for the re-appearing of Jesus Christ. Advent reminds us that God is always coming our way, and Christmas essentially is God's brand new idea, God's brand new way, inviting us to receive Him and to become part of His new venture. The question remains:

When the Son of God comes again, will He find faith on earth?

We tried those people who lived at the time of the first Christmas...

...we take the innkeeper to task, we condemn Herod, who could only react in a wicked way because he was unable to perceive the

wonder and the glory by which the world would be gifted through the coming of this king, this brand new king, who would talk about a brand new kingdom. We say, had we been there then, we would have cradled the Christ-child, we would have fallen upon our knees in adoration. Would we? Thousands upon thousands who had their chance then passed it by! Part of the lesson of Advent is: learn from the past! He who came - - comes! comes again! Will He find any takers? Will He find believers?

As the text puts it in the classic way, when the Son of God comes again, will He find faith on earth?

....you want to have some assurance?

Number One: Watch for Him!

Be on the look-out! There are any number of things that you and I miss in life because we have not been looking for them. Those of us who have done any traveling at all are always amazed when we meet fellow travelers when they come back, to find how much they saw that we didn't see, and to find out how much we saw that they never saw at all. It depends what you're looking for, you see. If you want to make certain that you won't miss Him when He comes again, keep yourself on the look-out -- He's always sending gracious intimations before He appears. He doesn't want us to miss Him. In a hundred-and-one different ways He's sending advance word. Would you believe me if I were to tell you that even our coming together every Sunday morning, as God calls us together through His Holy Spirit, it's His way of getting us ready for His final appearance in glory....

...when the Son of God comes again, will He find faith on earth?

....if you're looking for Him, you ought not to miss Him.

Watch. That's only part of the admonition. Watch and pray.

The soul needs to keep itself spiritually alert, sensitive to the things that belong to the things of the Kingdom. I take my soul to task ever so often when I remember how seldom do I pray that God may find me ready in the moment of His re-appearing. How long has it been since you prayed:

"God, keep me in perpetual readiness, so that I

might not miss You in all Your glory - - "

....whatever the reflection of that glory might be as day by day He comes.

Watch.....pray.

I'm so sorry, as some of you well know, that in these times of ferment and unsettlement, we're allowing some of the things that we cherish as tradition and as part of the Faith to slip from our grasp. I talk occasionally with some of my Roman Catholic brethren, and I deplore with them some of the things that are going by the board. As an example, there was a day when the devout Roman Catholic was taught to believe that in the critical moment of his life he should cry out for the priest and ask him to come, and if it should look like the moment of death, to administer to him the rite, to provide him Extreme Unction. What is this but to say:

"Lord, let me never fall from grace. Suffer me, not

in even the moment of death, to be alienated from Thee."

It's a precious thing for a man to order his life constantly in the thought that any moment he should be made ready for the Lord's re-appearing.

"When the Son of man comes again, will He find

faith on earth? - - "

...if you're watching for Him, you ought not to miss Him.....

...if you're praying that your soul might be made ready, you should be better prepared....

One final thing to suggest to you: If you're kept busy doing the things that are pleasing in God's sight!

God comes most, doesn't He, to those who are most occupied in the things that are pleasing to Him? If you want to make certain that He doesn't pass you by, keep yourself busily engaged in doing the things that belong to those who are in the Kingdom.

In the year 1780, in a New England colony, the House of Deputies was in session, in session at a time when there was a wide-spread belief that the end of the world was imminent. Much to their surprise, on the day that I now refer to, the sky was black, and the place where they were meeting was as dark as night. As you might surmise, panic set in. There were those who fell on their knees and began to cry out.....some rushed for the door. There was a many by the name of Col. Davenport, who was Speaker of the House of Deputies, and he stood up, and with a voice that could be heard by all of them above their panic, he said: "Gentlemen -- either the Day of Judgment has arrived... ..or it has not. If it has not, there's no cause for alarm; if it has arrived, then I for one desire to be found by my Lord faithfully doing my duty. Please - - let the candles be lighted. Let's proceed with the business at hand."

" - - but when the Son of man comes, will He find faith on earth? - - "

My answer? I think so. I believe so. Yes.

He will never be without His witnesses. There will always be those who will respond. Their number may not be as great as you might wish. You see, with all the discouraging things about the first Christmas story.....

....the indifferent innkeeper....the wicked Herod.....

- - there was a woman named Mary.....she believed.

- - there was a man named Joseph.....he believed.

- - there was an old man named Simeon.....who was so overcome when
he saw the Christ-child, he said, "Now let me die! Let me
depart in peace - - I've seen what I have been looking for!"

" - - when the Son of man appears, will He find
faith on earth? - - "

....I can't answer for other people. I suggest that you keep in mind you
have only to answer for yourself, which puts the question this way:

" - - when the Son of Man appears on earth, - - "
will He find faith in me? will I be a believer?

That's a good question. And believe you me, it's your question.

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

RIDICULOUS!

It's a good thing, O God, that the
Star shone as brightly as it did
that night, for if it hadn't been
by its light, some of us would never
have found the way. Amen.

And the text, familiar words to all of you:

"And suddenly there was with the angel a
multitude of the heavenly host, praising
God and singing, 'Glory to God in the
highest, and on earth peace among men
with whom He is pleased - - -"

That's the way the good news was sung to earth - - that's the way that
first Christmas congregation heard it. For when God wanted to give the
world the best news yet, He saw fit to have it sung into their hearts.
And from that day, from that night onward, whenever Christians are gathered
together, you may rest assured that they have come a-singing, and never more
so, perhaps, than at Christmas-time.

For Christmas and singing belong together. Christmas is basically a
time for singing. That's why now, for years, when we've come together on
the night that marks the birth of our Saviour, we've encouraged our choirs
to flank you on both sides, and in a relaxed sort of way to sing some of
the familiar Christmas carols. As for me, I don't know how it may be with
you - - I never quite tire of singing Christmas carols, and I don't know
that I can agree with some of you who say we begin singing them too soon.
Why, we don't even have Thanksgiving before we start hearing the Christmas
carols. The season passes all too quickly, you know.

Christmas is a great time for singing. I like all of the carols. In

fact, I'd be hard-pressed to name any one for which I would have some dislike. I like them all. And would you believe me that sometimes I wish we could sing in church one that I don't think I've ever heard sung in church. And if we had a supplement for your hymn-sheet tonight, in which we would introduce new songs to be sung at Christmas-time, some of you might be a bit shocked, of course.....

(singing, organ in background)

"On the first day of Christmas - -

- - a partridge in a
pear tree - - "

Sounds ridiculous, doesn't it?

Who would ever think of giving someone, at Christmas, a partridge in a pear tree? One ought to be realistic, you see - - one ought to give more practical gifts.....but I don't know that people write songs about practical gifts. They do write songs about partridges in a pear tree.

The man who wrote that song, you see, has had the satisfaction, wherever he may be, of hearing it sung, year in and year out....not only the partridge in the pear tree, but -- the song goes on -- with equally ridiculous things!

...two turtledoves...three French hens...

...six geese a-laying...seven swans swimming...

...eight maids milking.....

-- and do you know how it ends?

..with "twelve drummers drumming! - - "

Some time ago I read an article by a man who said maybe we'd get nearer to the spirit of Christmas if we took this 'partridge in a pear tree' seriouslythat if we'd think in terms of the ridiculous aspects of giving, like maybe we might surprise people if we gave them a nonsensical gift. Lovers do that,

you know. Did it ever occur to you how nonsensical the sending of roses can be? They wither...they fade! They just don't last. Yet if I were a gambling man, I'd be willing to wager, as long as lovers are around, they'll do the nonsensical thing of sending roses.....not a very practical gift. It just doesn't make sense.

But there are a lot of things that are very valuable to us that to some people don't make sense....

...the columnist went on to suggest that maybe some Christmas you ought to set aside the giving of practical things -- take Grandma as a good example -- don't send her that lace cap, those wool mittens....goodness knows, she has an ample supply already! But if you'd like to put a spring in her step, get her a bottle of perfume, Grandma, that is -- maybe even some lipstick. It might recall other days, brighter and better days.

Would you believe that one might make an approach like that! -- a partridge in a pear tree....a ridiculous thing, and yet I stand before you to suggest: not nearly as ridiculous as you might think, for when one remembers that first Christmas present, when one remembers what God gave to us -- how ridiculous it appeared in the eyes of people. The classic expression of Scripture is that they were wise men -- don't sell them short by calling them astrologers -- call them for what they were: they were wise men who traveled afar!

...and wouldn't you be a bit inclined to think that if you'd been a wise man and you'd come to the end of your journey, week in and week out, month after month, and some people say year after year -- to find journey's end, not in a palace, not in the

Halls of Parliament, not in the temple....

...but in the barnyard, where a baby is born in a donkey's
feeding trough.....ridiculous!! Absolutely ridiculous!!!

Think of Mary the mother of our Lord -- human as she was, she might have reacted as any human being would have reacted: "God, do you expect me to believe what You are telling me? Dear God, I know how babies come into this world! Do you expect me to believe something as ridiculous as all this -- that a virgin shall be with child?"

Put yourself in Joseph's place -- devout and faithful one that he was, and when he got the news, human as he was, might he not have reacted: "Ridiculous -- me to become involved in a thing like this!" But I'll tell you one thing that you might never have thought of before -- when you start taking God seriously, it's amazing how ridiculous some of the things occur to us that He always seems to be up to!

He was always up to doing something that human beings could never quite figure out. As an example, when His Blessed Son our Lord was here on earth, went around telling people to be kind to one another, telling people to be good to each other, telling people that there was such a thing in store for them as eternal life, and after this world God had some good thing laid up for those who believed in Him and trusted Him....

- - - ridiculous! -- that's the way some people branded the starry-eyed dreamer, the Carpenter's-Son-Who-Became-A-Preacher.....

Like as not, no matter how you look at it from a purely human point of view, when you try to figure out what God's up to, and you get some kind of revelation, you may be inclined to say: ridiculous! It just isn't sensible!

Wise men came looking for a king.

"They were all looking for a King,
To slay their foes and lift them high;
Thou cam'st, a little Baby thing,
To make a woman cry."

....how unlike God, to come as a baby? not fully developed? not riding a white charger? a weak child, for whom someone always had to be in attendance to do something for Him? Is this what God's up to now?

Some time ago a man wrote a book called "The Decisive Battles of The World." I haven't read it, but I can tell you the theme of the book. The theme of the book is simply this, that the course of history has been altered just because certain battles took place at a particular time and were fought in a certain way. And if these battles had not been fought where they were fought, and waged in the manner in which they were, the course of history would definitely have been altered.

....I don't know that I'll ever get around to reading the book, but I'll tell you a book that I would like to read, if some day someone would write it -- "The Decisive Babies of The World." For I think the thesis could be established that the course of history has been altered because at a particular time a certain baby was born....the year 1809 was a terrible year, not very promising. But you check sometime for yourself the great ones who were born in that particular year -- find out how the course of history has been altered because of the babies that were born then. Do I have to impress upon you how the course of history has been altered, yea, even history itself has been divided into the two segments -- before His birth and after His death -- because at a particular time and in a particular place a particular Baby was born.

This is not the way the world works. When the world wants something spectacular, it usually doesn't begin with a baby. We're much too much in a hurry for something like that! But God's about to take His time.

In the year 1789, on the 14th of July, a cobbler in an off-street in Paris wrote in his diary: "Nothing very important happened today."

...but that was the day when the French Revolution was born!

That was the day that altered the course of French history!

That was the day that altered the course of surrounding nations!

Imagine what one might have said, had he lived in Bethlehem at the time of the birth of Jesus Christ -- any number of people, whether they kept diaries or not, might have said, "Nothing very important happened today."

God's always dealing with surprises...surprising people, in surprising places, in surprising situations. He's a specialist in dealing with the things that appear ridiculous to our eyes. And when that Baby grew up, look how ridiculously He spent His life: He turned His back on the carpenter's trade and became a wandering preacher....He ate what other people gave HimHe slept wherever He could find a place to make His bed. There were some people one time who thought so much of Him, they said, "We want to make you a king" - - and He ran away from them and He wouldn't have a thing to do with them. Then one time it was made known to Him that He was going to die on a cross, and He did the thing that would never make sense to us -- He said, "All right, God, if this is the way it has to be, I'll do it!"

.....His whole life just doesn't make sense to us.....

....a partridge in a pear tree doesn't make sense either, but maybe the real meaning of life is to be found in the thing that the world calls ridiculous.

Christmas is a time when some of us do some ridiculous things -- we buy

a newspaper from a boy, just because we'd like to see him smile -- we have the same copy at home. We do some ridiculous thinking -- we take time to send a Christmas greeting to somebody that we haven't seen for a year and we don't care if we see them next year! But it's Christmas, and we'll do something as ridiculous as all that! A man might spend \$50.00 for a present to give to someone to whom he'd never as much as give 50 minutes of his time!

....we do some ridiculous things. And perhaps never more so than at Christmas-time!

....and yet I'm willing to suggest to you that the world is going to be saved by the people who go on doing things ridiculously in the name of love, and kindness, and compassion.

After one of the services....they've passed so quickly tonight, I've forgotten which one it was....the recession ended....he was the last one in the row. When I came to the last seat, when the lights were being lowered, there was a youngster -- completely ^{uninhibited} ~~uninhibited~~, who blurted out to his mother, "Now what do we do next?" -- a perfectly good question to ask when the worship service ends.....

.....and a perfectly good question to ask when a Christmas Eve service is over! What do we do next? -- we just go on, keeping the Christmas spirit -- ridiculously --

.....being a little bit more kind

.....being a little bit more patient

.....being a little bit more loving

.....being a little bit more believing....

...go on -- keep doing it! It might become a habit!

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

Through Jesus Christ, Thy Son,
our Lord. Amen.

The text is from the book of Jeremiah, the 9th chapter, the 23rd and the 24th verses:

"Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, his
might, his riches. But let him that glorieth
glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth
me, that I am the Lord which exercises loving-
kindness, judgment and righteousness in the
earth, for in these things I delight, says the
Lord."

Some years back, perhaps some of you may remember it, when the King of England was giving his New Year's greeting to the people of the Empire, he closed with a quotation that has won its way into the hearts of countless people across the face of the earth:

"I said to the man who stood at the gate of the year,
Give me a light that I may tread safely into the un-
known. And he replied, Go out into the darkness and
put your hand into the hand of God. That will be to
you better than a light; it will be safer than any
known way."

Her words have often been repeated. We're not only intrigued by them, because we are not so sure that we fully understand what they mean, nonetheless we'd like them very much to mean what we think they ought to mean, for they give

us the assurance that no matter where the future may lead us, and no matter how dark and uncertain it may be, we are being led, being led by Someone we can trust. So as we close one year and look forward to another year, as believers in the Lord Jesus Christ who said, "I am the Way,, the Truth and the Life" -- we are not intrigued, we are convinced! ~~But He~~ is the One who has led us through the past, and because He has not failed us in days and years gone by, we have every reason to believe that we can trust Him in all that lies ahead.

I do not know how it may be with you, but as for myself, I face this night with a fair degree of awe -- not that there is anything magical about December 31.....it is a division, you see, that we have made....but nonetheless we do think in terms of a chapter in time that has closed, that can never again be repeated. And we think in the terms of the future yet to be unfolded. Hopefully we would like to take, all of us would like to take from God's hand the complete gift of a twelve-month period -- honestly we would -- and as you and I gather in this place tonight, we shall not think in terms of living only one month, three months, four months, six months. But we're thinking in terms of taking from God's hand a complete chapter in time known as 1972.

But I say to you, I face it with fear and trembling, for the simple reason that as I look back over a year that has already run its course, so much could happen, so much did happen, within a five-minute span of time -- one shudders to realize what could happen in a five-week span of time, a five-month span of time. Nonetheless, the fact remains: we shall not turn away from it; rather we shall give thanks to God that we can face 1972.

But as we face 1972 we're able to do it without fear and without trembling, whatever has been said before notwithstanding, because we do believe that there is One whose hand will guide us. I cherish the sentiment expressed so well by someone who said, "I do not know what the future may have in hand, but I know the One in whose hand the future is held." And that makes a great deal of difference.

The text for tonight, as one anticipates another chapter in time:
"Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, his might and his riches"

....but upon sober reflection, isn't that just the kind of thing that would bring us a fair degree of satisfaction as we face another year? We say to ourselves, if only we might have more strength in '72 than we had in '71!.....if only we could be kept from making those terrible mistakes that we made in all the years that have come and gone!.....if only we had just a little bit more money! How much more easily we could face the future! Do you dare me, so I react when I read this text, to take it seriously? -- that a man ought not to find a certain sense of satisfaction in being a little bit wiser in the future than he was in the past?....in being somewhat stronger in the future than what he was in the past?....and surely having more financial security than all the anxiety he knew because he lacked the funds that he wished he had in other years?

...don't you and I take certain people to task just because they are stupid and not wise?just because they become irresponsible and make no provision in allowing themselves a cushion by way of financial security? ...who among us does not take people to task because they dissipate themselves and do not gather enough strength in order to be made more adequate to the

demands of life?

Yet the Scriptural account remains as it is written: "Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, in his might, in his riches."

But Scripture always has to be read in its entirety. You ought never to take a passage of Scripture out of its context. Let God, if you please, finish His sentences. Give God a chance to complete His thought. So the text reads on, and Jeremiah the wise man of God put it properly when he said, "Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, in his might, in his riches." The emphasis is on the personal pronoun. God says a man ought not to say to himself: I am wise...

I am strong....

I am rich.....

...as though all of this has come by his hand. But rather, says the voice-piece for God, "let him glory in the fact that I am merciful, and that I exercise lovingkindness and judgment and righteousness in all the earth. In these things I delight, says the Lord."

So one does well to say to himself, If I want to walk into the future with the hand of God to guide me, then it makes commonsense, doesn't it, that if people are to walk together, then they ought to be agreed? Said another wise man of God, "Shall two walk together unless they are agreed?" So if you and I want to be sustained and guided by the hand of God in the future, then we do well to look to those things that are pleasing in His sight. What are the things that God prefers, if we are to walk by His guiding hand? Jeremiah gave the answer: lovingkindness; judgment; and riches. So as you and I begin another chapter in time, confident that the hand of God will lead us -- we can have that confidence just as long as we

seek after the things that are pleasing in God's sight. But as long as you and I no longer look to the things that please God, what assurance then can we have that we are being guided by Him into the future?

There are many things, my friend, that may serve as a magnet that may draw you into the future, any number of things. And not all of them are good. Evil itself is a very powerful magnet, and it's constantly drawing us in its direction. But it's only the second most powerful force in the world. Good is always greater. Good is always stronger. If only we will respond to it. And God says, "You may have this assurance if constantly you permit yourself to delight in the things that please Me."

I don't know what resolutions you may be making for 1972, but let me encourage you to make a very simple one: To earnestly desire more fervently to think God's thoughts and to desire the things that are pleasing in His sight. Then no matter what 1972 will bring to you, you may rest assured that you'll always be moving in the direction in which God wants you to move.

Let me conclude this brief meditation tonight by reading for you a letter that someone some years back wrote, as he pictured the New Year itself speaking:

"My Dear Friend.....I write to introduce myself. I shall be with you in a very few hours, but I want you to know something about me before we actually meet. My name is ...1972. You and I are going to share the same house for a long time -- a whole year in fact. Much of what happens to us will depend on you. I shall bring joy, and I shall bring sorrow. I shall bring success, and I shall bring failure. What you can determine is your reaction to these things, by your own wisdom, your own unselfishness and your faith, you'll be able to keep control of the situa-

tion and transform even tragedy into triumph. I bring you hope -- new hope. I bring you hope not only for your own life but for the world in which you live. By God's grace and power, I could be the turning-point in history, a year of peace and sanity and decency for all men upon earth. Here's a word from the Bible for you:

'Be strong and of good courage. Fear not,
nor be afraid, for the Lord God, He it is
that goes with thee. He will not fail
thee, He will not forsake thee.'

You can face the future with confidence when your hand is in the hand of God. Look upon me, then, as,

Your sincere friend,

1972

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)